

# RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

A PLATFORM FOR THE FREE DISCUSSION OF  
ISSUES IN THE FIELD OF RELIGION AND  
THEIR BEARING ON EDUCATION

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 1954



MASS MEDIA OF COMMUNICATION —  
VALUE PATTERNS AND EFFECTS  
A Symposium

BOOK REVIEWS

# Religious Education

## *Official Publication of the Religious Education Association*

Seeks to present, on an adequate, scientific plane, those factors which make for improvement in religious and moral education. The Journal does not defend particular points of view, contributors alone being responsible for opinions expressed in their articles. It gives its authors entire freedom of expression, without any official endorsement. Articles in Religious Education are indexed in the EDUCATION INDEX which is on file in educational institutions and public libraries.

Membership in the Association is \$5.00 or more per year.  
Single copies of Religious Education, \$1.00 each.

HERMAN E. WORNOM, General Secretary, 545 West 111th Street, New York 25, N. Y.

LEONARD A. STIDLEY, Editor  
Oberlin College,  
Oberlin, Ohio

## EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

LEONARD A. STIDLEY, Dean and Professor of Religious Education, Graduate School of Theology, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio, Chairman.

WALTER M. HORTON, Professor of Systematic Theology, Graduate School of Theology, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio.

ALVIN J. COOPER, Board of Education, United Church of Canada, Toronto.

THOMAS S. KEPLER, Professor of New Testament, Graduate School of Theology, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio.

EMMA FRANK, Librarian, Graduate School of Theology, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio.

HERBERT G. MAY, Professor of Old Testament, Graduate School of Theology, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio.

EMANUEL GAMORAN, Commission on Jewish Education, New York City.

GERARD S. SLOYAN, Department of Religious Education, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C.

LEO HONOR, Professor of Education, Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, Philadelphia, Pa.

LEO WARD, Professor of Philosophy, Notre Dame University, Notre Dame, Indiana.

## The Religious Education Association

General Secretary and Business Office, 545 W. 111th Street,  
New York 25, N. Y.

Editorial and Publication Office, 29 N. Pleasant St., Oberlin, Ohio  
Printed at 48 S. Main Street, Oberlin, Ohio

\* Published bi-monthly. Printed in the U. S. A.

# RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

VOLUME XLIX      NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1954      NUMBER 6

## CONTENTS

	Page
<b>Mass Media of Communication — Value Patterns and Effects —</b>	
<b>A Symposium</b> .....	371
I The Problem of Mass Communication ..... <i>William Miller</i>	371
II The Value Patterns and Effects of the Motion Pictures ..... <i>Van A. Harvey</i>	375
III The Twilight World of Popular Songs ..... <i>Arthur C. McGill</i>	382
IV What About the Paperback? ..... <i>D. S. Tillson</i>	389
V The Curse of the Comic Books — The Value Patterns and Effects of Comic Books ..... <i>Fredric Wertham</i>	394
VI The Senate Subcommittee Hearings on the Comic Book Industry ..... <i>Gerard S. Sloyan</i>	407
VII How Canada Has Dealt With the Comic Book Situation Through Legislation ..... <i>E. D. Fulton</i>	416
VIII The Comic Books! Most Insidious Poison — Materialism ..... <i>Harold C. Gardiner</i>	419
IX The Advent Season and the Mass Media ... <i>Kenneth Underwood</i>	422
X Basic Issues in Communications in the Education of Protestant Ministers ..... <i>Dallas Smythe</i>	429
Significant Evidence ..... <i>Ernest M. Ligon and William A. Koppe</i>	439
Book Reviews .....	441
Index to Volume XLIX — 1954 .....	445

## CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Please notify RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, 545 West 111th Street,  
New York 25, N. Y., of change of address, giving both old and new  
addresses.

Send notification of change of address at least four weeks in advance.

The United States Post Office does not automatically forward second  
class matter.

Entered as second-class matter, January 23, 1948, at the Post Office at Oberlin,  
Ohio, under the Act of March 3, 1879.

## Back Issues of RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

now available at 50c each (regular price \$1.00)

- Nov.-Dec. 1948: *Religion in Higher Education*—a symposium including Virgil Hancher on "Spiritual Values," Milton McLean on "Diagnosing Patterns of Religious Belief," Philip Seman on "Hillel's Growth as a Vital Force in Higher Education," etc.
- Jan.-Feb. 1949: *Trends in Religious Education*—a symposium covering Protestant, Catholic and Jewish education, inter-cultural education, weekday religious education and books on religious education; plus a history of the Religious Education Association.
- May-June 1949: *Religious Nurture, 1949*—a symposium by Agnes Snyder, Samuel Hamilton, Frank and Mildred Eakin, C. P. Penniman and others; and a syllabus by Lawrence Little on "Religion and Public Education."
- Sept.-Oct. 1949: *Music in Religious Education*—a symposium, including Marguerite Hazzard, Edith Lovell Thomas, Katherine Rohrbach; also Edna Baxter on the "Tufts Laboratory School" and Ordway Tead on "Facing the Unforeseen."
- Nov.-Dec. 1949: *Religion and Public Education*—a symposium, including Samuel P. Franklin, Thomas West, Erwin Shaver; Report on a Survey of Religious Faith of Los Angeles Youth; and articles by Clarice Bowman on "Curriculum of Worship Training" and Elmer Homrighausen on "Theology and Education."
- Jan.-Feb. 1950: *Religion in Higher Education*—a symposium including Bernard Meland on "Integrity in Higher Education" and Harold Barr on "Cooperative Religious Teaching at the University of Kansas"; and articles by Wesner Fallaw, "Roles of Minister and Director of Religious Education" and Ordway Tead, "Young People in the World Today."
- Sept.-Oct. 1950: *Religion in an On-Going Society*—a symposium including Leslie Sayre on "Religion and Culture," Frank Lindhorst, "Religion and the Educational Development of Society," and Harrison Elliott, "Religion and the Future Society," also articles by Paul Limbert, "New Light on Adolescents"; Edwin Espy, "The Theism of Teachers in Church Related Colleges" and Sam Rosenkranz, "Must Naturalism be Godless?"
- Jan.-Feb. 1951: *Trends in Religious Education*—a symposium covering Catholic Education, Jewish Education, Released Time, Group Dynamics, Statistics, Books, The Kentucky Program on Moral and Spiritual Values, etc.
- Sept.-Oct. 1951: *A Memorial to Harrison S. Elliott* (nine articles on his life and work); abstracts of Doctoral Dissertations in Religious Education, 1949-50; and articles on "Religion in Family Life" and "Research Findings in Human Development."
- July-Aug. 1952: *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*—a symposium by the translators, including Luther A. Weigle, James Muilenburg, Fleming James, Harry Orlinsky and Herbert May; a second symposium, "The Bible—The Word of Life," by John Trever, Ralph Heim, Merrill Powers and Rueben Mueller.
- Sept.-Oct. 1952: *The Curriculum of Religious Education*—a symposium by Paul Vieth, Lenoard Stidley, Dale Keeler, Ralph Mould, Gerald Knoff, Norman Langford and Edna Baxter.

### RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

545 West 111th Street, New York 25, N. Y.

I enclose \_\_\_\_\_ for the following back issues (give dates of issues below)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street and Number \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zone \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_



# Mass Media of Communication— Value Patterns and Effects

## A SYMPOSIUM

*The extensive contemporary mass media of communication are strongly influencing both religion and education.*

*We are indebted to the authors who have contributed articles to this symposium, analyzing the nature and effects of current mass media and suggesting roles which religion may play in their relationships with mass media.*

*We are confident that the readers of this magazine will find these articles informative, stimulating and helpful.*

—The Editorial Committee

### I

## THE PROBLEM OF MASS COMMUNICATION

WILLIAM MILLER

*Department of Religion and Biblical Literature, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.*

THE REAL problem of "values" in mass communication is not how much violence, how much sex, how much drinking, how many penthouses, how many unpunished murders, but rather the nature of the operation which produces a selectivity in such matters.

A religious criticism of the movies and television which concentrates only upon promoting the "wholesome" and (much more) resisting the "unwholesome" may ironically be fighting on the wrong side. The heart of the problem of mass communication is not that it promotes "bad morals" but that it makes "mass men." The moralistic restriction of communication by religious groups may encourage the inoffensive and banal, and thus add further strength to the pressures to eliminate the new, the critical, and the discriminating productions which appeal to a man's mind and heart in its depth. The productions which religious educators should promote are not the "wholesome" ones but the good ones.

This is not to deny that there need to be some minimal restrictions and pressures on the most egregious offenses against taste and accepted morality. But the promoting of those minimal restrictions should not be assumed to be the only, or the primary, religious

response to the communications industry. The problem is in the meaning and quality of the whole of the mass media, not how many gunshots, how high skirts are, and how many drinks are taken. Our attempt to restrict should not lead us into inflexible codes. The fight against the flood of Mickey Spillane entertainment is at its heart a struggle over the depth of the community's understanding of personality, and that struggle can be aided only slightly and occasionally and gingerly by the application of codes, rules, pressures, and legislation.

It is unsettling to read how sometimes religious spokesmen proudly say that the Hollywood production code (adopted in large part through their pressure) has "cleaned up" and thus solved the problem of the morality of the movies. The moral problem of the film remains, and has in fact increased with the increased development of the techniques of mass manipulation. The "clean up" attitude involves too narrow a definition of what is moral. It sometimes appears, too, in the religious group's relation to politics, as when it is assumed that the responsibility of religion is simply to deal with "moral issues" like "corruption," not with the purpose and direction of the whole of political life. Such an attitude means that the real substance of the

moral problems of our national life are debated, struggled over, and solved while the religious groups tinker on the periphery with their narrowly defined problems of code morality.

Inherent in the new means of communication, as in all new levels of human freedom, are both great possibilities for evil and great possibilities for good. It is the responsibility of the religious community to reiterate and demonstrate that both these possibilities exist, and that a continuing necessity and responsibility for choice remains with all of us who are related to these instruments.

To the advertising man or movie producer or radio man, who says that these new instruments of mass communication are wholly good, or in his most thoughtful moments says that they are neutral, and can be used for good or evil, the religious community needs to insist on the tendency to the evil that is inherent in the instrument itself. This propensity to evil rests in the nature of the communication as "mass." The relationship to the audience necessarily tends toward manipulation. The man who is dealt with is actuarial: man in the gross, man in the movement of statistical indices. This almost necessarily results in a more and more shallow view of man. The tendency is toward an emphasis upon the short-run, speed, number, and exaggeration: upon what will catch the most people the fastest. The tendency of the techniques of mass communication is to eliminate that which takes longer to absorb, the critical, the new, the subtle. The short-run commercial considerations usually dominate the creative process itself. The man in the audience comes to be regarded not as a person, with those qualities of discrimination, rationality, self-transcendence, and individuality which mark a soul and child of God, but as an animal which responds to bright lights, loud noises, and pretty girls.

The dangers of mass communication have been satirized in books and stories about the technological future. In the *Brave New World* and 1984, mass communication plays a horrible role. The writers of these inverted utopias, which one writer called "futopias," make plain the danger to personality inherent

in the methods of mass communication. They make it plain (a) in the way machines and formulae take over production, (b) in the way the synthetic and exaggerated supplant the real and balanced in the content, and (c) in the way the audience becomes more and more captive, passive, and coerced. In each case we can find parallels in the real world which give point to the warnings of the futurists.

# I

The production of material by machines rather than by persons, with a machine-tested audience in view, is satirized in books like 1984 and *The Space Merchants*. Material is scientifically designed to have its effect without passing through the mind of either the producer or the hearer. In 1984's language, Newspeak, the ultimate hope is "to make articulate speech issue from the larynx without involving the higher brain centers at all." "The intention is to make speech as nearly as possible independent of consciousness."

Thomas Whiteside tells about some real development in the present world along this line in his book about mass selling, *The Relaxed Sell*. He talks of the extensive use of wires and graphs and machines to test materials for radio and television, not only in the well-known Hooper and Nielson ratings, whose points up and down make or break the performers' careers, but also now in "pre-testing" devices, like the Gagmeter which tests the laughs for jokes, the Psychogalvanometer which judges the effectiveness of commercials, and the Program Analyzer, which tests the program. Hollywood movies, which have long been changed to fit the reaction of the teenagers in some California theater, now are subjected to mechanical devices which test the audience's reaction to films and reproduce these reactions on a graph, so the production can be rearranged accordingly. A man who developed a machine to "pretest" plays to find which would gross the most, has worked out an electro-mechanical device called "telldox" which is now in business testing audience reactions to the outlines of book manuscripts. The authors can rewrite according to the dictates of the machine for a wider scale.

## II

The nightmare of the future sees men who prefer the synthetic to the real, mass communication to life. In *The Machine Stops*, E. M. Forster's story which was one of the earliest of the futopias, the principal figure is annoyed at the possibility of actual contact with other human beings, and lives with a great machine which dominates life and transmits relationships by a screen. It is upsetting to be out in actual sunlight and in contact with the real world, rather than in the dark room where the machine and the screens dominate and provide for everything.

Arthur Mayer, in his book of reminiscence about the movie industry, *Merely Colossal*, tells how MGM found the real coliseum in Rome inadequate for the filming of "Ben Hur," and erected a better one in Culver City, California. He tells how an early film company made a remarkable contract with Pancho Villa in which he agreed to fight only in daylight when the cameras could photograph real hand-to-hand fighting. Villa kept his part of the contract, in return for a substantial sum, but when the negative was developed the movie executive found the fighting too tame, and had to shoot it all over again, with more corpses and blood, on the studio lot. He says that Paramount, shooting a sequence in "War of the Worlds," photographed the atomic blast near Las Vegas but found it disappointing. They supplanted it with a special effect, an explosion synthetically created by studio experts.

## III

Mass communication tends toward the more and more complete invasion of captive audiences by ever new dimensions. In *The Space Merchants*, the day when the advertising agents have taken over, is portrayed. They use the consumers as endlessly manipulated objects of sales. As one looks at the scenery from an airplane, for example, the windows are "opaqued" with visual commercials, which are also accompanied by "olfactory" effects, which throw the appropriate smells into the plane. The passengers are trapped in view, hearing and smelling of the message.

The possibilities of new dimension were

perhaps most memorably satirized by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*. In it there was an entertainment called the "feelies." "Going to the feelies this evening, Henry? I hear the new one at the Alhambra is first-rate. There is a love scene on a bearskin rug; they say it's marvelous. Every hair of the bear reproduced. The most amazing tactual effects."

Real world approximations of these prospects are not too hard to find. The captive audience in Grand Central terminal and in the streetcars of Washington, D. C. and other cities, and cinerama, 3-D, and cinemascope, with their ever-increasing attempt to give the audience more and more simulated sensations of participation in a recreated reality, give some approximation of the "feely." I haven't been able to find any actual "feelies" but Arthur Mayer does tell about a plan of his for an odor track to be attached to the film to produce the right smell at the right moment. Unfortunately, Mayer discovered that although the smell of an apple orchard, burning leaves, roses and honeysuckle, and a disinfectant for a hospital scene, could be blown into the theater at the appropriate time, they could not be properly withdrawn. The mingled result became quite overpowering. One is reminded of Henry Morgan's comment, when discussing a similar proposal for television, that he would hate to have to follow an animal act.

## IV

To the too sanguine defender of the developments of mass communication the religious community needs to say that there are evils here, evils in the manipulation of persons, in the reduction of them to the lowest common denominator level, in the moving inside of minds to manipulate emotions and feelings for certain commercial and political ends.

But, on the other hand, the futopians who so dramatically present the evil trends in mass communication may fail to see the corresponding possibilities for good. The horrible view of a technological future dominated by manipulative communications may be the inverse of the too sanguine view. As religious thought must be critical of progressive thought with an overoptimistic estimate of

each gain in man's control over nature and himself, so also it needs to be critical of the complete disillusionment which sometimes follows in its wake. A terrifying vision of a manipulative future may be the other side of the coin from an older rosy vision of the results of science. Futopia is the companion of utopia. Because the outlook upon the world is too much concentrated upon man's accomplishment in the first place, it swings from a too confident to a too despairing estimate of mass communication.

For this realm is one of creativity as well as a tendency to evil. The positive results of our use of our freedom are visible in it. And the real world parallels to the futopian nightmares lack something of their terror: there is something of the ludicrous, and of the problematic in the real problem which is absent from the terrible dream.

The interpretation of the mass media which sees in them simply a narcotic for the masses, a substitute for reality, a channel away from thought, emotion and time and energy which should be used in the real world, can only partly make its case. R. G. Collingwood, the British philosopher, noted the parallel between the bread and circuses of Rome and the *dôle* and the films, the amusement madness of our time. Veblen found the same parallel in "the bread lines and the movies." But, though it is true that mass communication operates from a basic premise not to offend anyone, and does not treat controversial subjects in depth, still they treat them. On balance David Riesman is probably more right when he says that there is more of politics and "reality" in the mass media than the audience wants. And as the communications industry becomes bigger, richer, and more concentrated it does not necessarily become more escapist; probably, on balance, less so. As Marx was wrong in expecting workers to become more miserable as capitalism developed, so the too complete criticism of communications is probably wrong in expecting audiences to be more and more manipulated. At worst, the picture is mixed.

Though it has supplied Mickey Spillane in spectacular quantities, still the new pocket-

book industry is on balance a gratifying development in providing reading (good and bad) at low prices and accessible places. The radio has raised our taste in symphonic music, as well as introduced the soap opera. The amount of good programs on television is striking, at least to me. And the movies have not necessarily become worse as they have developed broader markets and bigger profits; I think one could defend the thesis that they have become better. The number of movies about which significant religious interpretations may be made is not small, and the amount of entertainment which is not cheap but moderately intelligent is considerable.

Therefore, we need to revise an over-anxious estimate of the potentialities of mass communications to see that something problematical needs to be said about them. We need to question the horrified and sometimes snobbish reaction which repudiates all mass communication, which refuses to have a television set in its home, which regards the movies as entirely debasing.

As the human spirit has more possibilities for evil than the utopians saw, so it has more strength to resist its own corruptions than the futopians see.

## V

So what should be the role of the religious group in relation to the values in mass communication? It should not deal in petty moralism, neither should it just denounce the operations as a whole (as some clergymen do, for example, of "Hollywood"). Rather our role should be to develop *criticism*. We should develop discrimination in the audiences we affect. We need to teach a selectivity in relation to the mass media. We need serious criticisms of movies and television in our religious magazines. We need serious teaching of the evaluation of movies and television in our schools. We need clergy who can interpret what is being said in movies and television in religious terms. This area of life, like all others, is one of continuing struggle, in which we have a responsibility to choose.

## II

### THE VALUE PATTERNS AND EFFECTS OF THE MOTION PICTURES

VAN A. HARVEY

*Professor of Philosophy, Princeton University, Princeton, N. J.*

#### I

THE TITLE of this article might seem to suggest to some that there are certain phenomena called 'values' embedded in the motion pictures and that these values have certain immediate effects for good or ill. And further, that religious educators ought, therefore, to awaken the apathetic public to the realization that certain of these values are false and that something ought to be done about it, such as writing to the film industry or to exhibitors threatening them with boycott or more serious extremes.

There is some truth in this interpretation but a truth both oversimplified and somewhat distorted and, therefore, until properly understood, untrue. It suffers from oversimplification and distortion both in respect to the delineation of 'moral values' and with regard to the effects that these values are conceived to have upon the motion picture audience. Consequently, this view misunderstands the nature of the responsibility of the religious educator to the churches, not to mention the motion picture industry.

Religious commentators on the motion pictures are, in the nature of the case, tempted to direct their attention to the 'morality of the films' to the neglect of the more imaginative and creative aspects of the medium. Occupied largely with goodness and badness, sharply defined, they fail to comprehend the intimate relation between form and content, expression and meaning, imagination and morality. They are prone to forget that the less tangible aspects of motion picture production—direction, characterization, cutting, mood—may alter and influence the context of the value patterns and thereby condition their meaning and 'effects.' They are tempted to ignore the

fact that the morality of a film may lie as much in its handling of a theme as in the theme handled, that a sensitive and delicate treatment of immorality may actually have a moral effect, just as there is something immoral about 'morality' too superficially depicted.

For example, the ultimate mood of a picture allegedly full of religious value patterns, such as "Demetrius and the Gladiators" may be such that the audience comes away with the not-so-vague impression that Victor Mature's experiences were much more emotionally rewarding—certainly far more interesting—as a gladiator than they were as a Christian. For after having renounced his faith for a season, (a good three quarters of the running time of the picture) he was able to slaughter his enemies, dispatch half a dozen tigers, dally with another man's wife, and ogle approximately forty thinly-clad dancing girls. Of course it was obvious throughout that the saintly—in a Hollywood sort of way—Peter would rescue him from this carnal life of sin and that Demetrius would return to the service of his Lord not to mention the arms of sweet little Debra Paget. Even repentance must have its more tangible rewards.

This mood, in contrast to the intended 'moral lesson' of the film may account for the quite 'unChristian' effect of spontaneous applause which rippled through the audience when the Christian hero, Demetrius, literally hacked his enemies to death or when the mad Caligula received his just desert—a four foot lance through the chest. It may also illuminate the reason for the tears visible upon the faces of women in the theatre when Susan Hayward finally was forced to relinquish her illicit relation with Victor Mature and return to the much more



unexciting duties as wife of the aging Emperor.

Yet we ought not to leave the impression that the intangibles of mood and characterization—the art of the film—are to be studied *merely because* they are a clue to the moral effects of the motion picture. Perhaps, as we shall suggest, the artistic aspects of film production have a value in themselves. Religious commentary solely concerned with abstracting 'moral values' tends to be slightly humorless, so single minded that it is not able to appreciate the morality of an enlargement of the imagination—and the motion pictures not uncommonly mediate such an experience—nor the religious dimension of an insight into the depth of the human situation regardless of the value patterns which seem explicitly to be espoused.

Commentary dedicated to the sifting of values is tempted on the one hand to a type of negativism which denounces certain more readily identifiable lapses in the taste and propriety and, on the other, is often much too eager to bestow uncritical praise on pictures in which the value patterns happen to be peculiarly similar to those of the critic.

## II

More serious than the deficient analyses of values is the defective conception of the function and effects of the motion pictures. Because their function in American culture has not been clearly understood by the churches, they have failed to relate themselves responsively to one of the dominant sources of self-interpretation in our society.

The churches have in the past seemed to reason in this fashion: Motion pictures are important as entertainment. Since large numbers of people—especially children—entertain themselves in this manner and since these movies would appear to have an immediate effect on impressionable minds, it follows that they ought to be kept clean and wholesome, free from all depiction of immorality if possible. The churches have a responsibility to see that this is done and the most effective way to discharge it is to bring pressure on the industry itself in order that high standards might be maintained.

The consequences of this type of reasoning by the churches are becoming clear. As the motion pictures have attained a measure of maturity and are no longer dependent on sensationalism as such for audience appeal, the churches seem to have concluded that they have accomplished their aim and fulfilled their obligations. Since most movies are relatively clean, criticism was considered unnecessary and *relatively unimportant* since motion pictures are, after all, "only entertainment." (Does one comment on golf or swimming?) Moreover, whatever religious commentary and criticism that existed was directed not at the religious audience which presumably read the reviews but at the motion picture producers who—we can safely assume—did not. The reviewers on occasion have displayed a more realistic appraisal of their real reading public but too often this recognition has gone hand in hand with appeals to boycott pictures that they have thought detrimental to the cause of organized religion, on the one hand, or uncritical praise, on the other, when the pictures were sympathetic to ministers, priests, nuns and other obviously religious or moral subjects. It never seems to have occurred to the churches—except in some notable instances—that *sustained interpretation of the film might be a legitimate role for a church dedicated to helping its members understand themselves in their culture*. How else can one account for the almost universal dearth of sustained and responsible commentary in the religious press?

To be sure, many church publications often print summaries together with an inadequate rating system—"adults," "family," "not for children"—but this is not interpretation. That is, it neither provides standards for independent evaluation nor does it illumine the relation of one's religious faith to the content of the cinema.

It is true that motion pictures are entertainment. But it does not follow from this that they are therefore 'unimportant,'—to be compared with swimming, for example. It is also true that the motion pictures have effects upon the minds of children and adults. It does not follow that these 'effects'



are immediate or that this 'effect' is of such a nature that it can be corrected by sporadic institutional pressure. As G. Legner has pointed out in *Love and Death*, censorship of sex may only lead to the substitution of a more subtle type of immorality such as sadism.

A more careful study of the meaning and nature of the 'effects' of motion pictures may help to illuminate the function of the movies and thus the creative possibilities of sustained and responsible religious commentary.

Contemporary studies made by social psychologists and opinion analysts lend themselves to the interpretation that there is no measurable correlation between audience values and beliefs and those of any one film, even when that film is one on a controversial subject such as race prejudice. This may only indicate, of course, that values and beliefs are not amenable to quantifiable indices. It might also indicate that the potency of the motion picture lies in a more nebulous and ill-defined area, in the long range production of symbols and images which occur as well in other mass media such as advertising and the slick magazines. More technically, the motion pictures provide a series of motifs, themes, myths, value patterns, if you will, which serve as a means of self-understanding for millions of those who have no other source for the interpretation of their experiences. There is a good deal of evidence that children of this generation do not go to the movies in order to discover ideals in the static sense of the word such as how to dress, make love and the like. They seem to go, as David Riesman points out "not so much to look at a make believe world as in order to understand complex networks of interpersonal relations." That is to say, they are looking for 'interpersonal competence' and the motion pictures are one source of norms for the understanding of ideal father-son, husband-wife, lover-beloved relationships.<sup>1</sup>

If it is asked why the motion pictures, an entertainment media, assume such a dominant role in self-interpretation rather than the church, the family or the school, the answer is to be found in the fact that American culture no longer looks to the realm of work and production for its values and meanings but increasingly to the leisure sphere. As C. Wright Mills, in his book *White Collar*, has explained, we've witnessed in the past few decades a switch from a work ethic to a leisure ethic, a work-morality to a fun-morality. Whereas leisure was once evaluated in terms of its contribution to a man's work, it has now become apparent that one's work is tolerated only in so far as it provides the means of leisure. Whereas the sphere of production once cast up the symbols for identification and success, it is increasingly true that the sphere of consumption and entertainment now provides the identification models for modern man. If adventure, risk, drama, were once found in the competitive market and struggle for existence, these 'values' seem now to be largely transplanted to the radio-give-away show, sports, and of course the movies. In Mills' words, "It is the leisure sphere that creates the myths, legends and themes with which millions orient their lives."

It is evident that the motion pictures fulfill a function that far transcends that of mere entertainment. Their content reflect this in so far as they are largely devoted to problems people face in their leisure—was there ever a picture about work before "Executive Suite"?—or at least with problems that are remotely connected with one's vocation. The psychologist tells us—and discerning people have known it also—that a man does not enter into the most important relationships of his life except as an interpreting and valuating creature. He "acts" in a "world," a "world" which he sees through and in a personal history which is conditioned by his family, his social class, and his deepest beliefs. The teen-ager does not just 'fall in love,' for both 'falling' and 'love' have a peculiar content which cannot be understood apart from his or her sources of self-understanding. The young adult does

<sup>1</sup>David Riesman, *Individualism Reconsidered and Other Essays*. I am indebted to Mr. Riesman for his suggestiveness which led to this analysis.

not merely want to 'be a success,' both 'be' and 'success' have a determinate structure and pattern which are intelligible only in relation to his sources of self-interpretation.

The motion pictures are important because they are one of the most influential sources of such images of interpretation. Their power, of course, is not simply their own, for their themes and motifs are picked up and re-echoed by radio, television, advertising and these in turn influence the films. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to know whether the movies are simply a mirror or a source. Probably they are both. This makes it even more important that motion picture criticism from a religious point of view relate itself responsibly to them.

A hypothesis seems to suggest itself if the preceding analysis is correct; the motion pictures are a fruitful area for religious commentary and this commentary ought to be a peculiar type of commentary, that is, a commentary which is not primarily concerned with praise or blame of the film industry nor one aimed indirectly at exerting pressure upon it. Rather it would be criticism whose primary aim is interpretation, that is, aimed primarily at illuminating the content of the films from a religious point of view. Its function would be to raise to self-consciousness the self-understanding of the believer as he participates in his culture through the motion pictures. It would unfold and analyze the forms of human existence which are portrayed in the films, whether superficial or profound, shallow or authentic. It would aid the believer in interpreting what he sees and provide him with the means whereby he might make his own creative interpretation. It would presuppose that his faith enables him to have a perspective from the standpoint of his ultimate loyalty which the culture does not have. In short the believer might be led to an understanding not only of himself but of his existence in relation to others. This leads us to some further reflections on the nature of such criticism.

### III

Religious commentary on the motion pictures would be concerned with 'the value

patterns and effects of motion pictures' but both the values and the effects would be more comprehensively interpreted. Criticism would be directed towards increasing understanding and appreciation of the motion pictures themselves as an art form and as a reflection of the self-interpretation of a large segment of American culture.

It is a temptation to write that the movies tend to propagate a 'philosophy of life' but unfortunately this phrase tends to obscure the variety of patterns which find expression in the product of Hollywood. There is a sense in which a general ideological pattern can be distinguished with regard to romantic love, success, and the like. But the fact that many people go to the motion pictures for many different reasons and out of a variety of needs and therefore do not necessarily see what another sees ought not to be obscured. There is more diversity in the Hollywood product than most of its critics are willing to admit, and there are more varied evaluations and interpretations than our stereotypes of the "common man" often permit.

Religious commentary must be based on an understanding of the many, many different levels of interpretation that are present in our culture. While there may be common value patterns present in a film, it may be that various groups, even individuals, interpret the same content from many different points of view. Children, adults, intellectuals, workers, all bring different backgrounds and different worlds and they utilize the material that they find in different ways. A great deal of research could be profitably done in discovering some of these various types of interpretations. But there is even now enough of a pattern visible to significantly aid the commentator in his work.

The commentator can learn, for instance, that thousands of teen-agers interpret the content of the films with the aid of fan magazines and comic books. The teen-ager, one suspects, may not, like the adult, see a motion picture and interpret it in abstraction from the stars who play in it. The fan magazines are devoted to an interpreta-

tion of the lives of the stars, their habits, personal beliefs, love lives and the like. A teen-ager, therefore, may not see a young blond with a lovely voice and pleasant smile. He or she knows that this is Jane Powell and that recently the fan magazines have appeared with stories commending her for her 'courage,' her ability to sacrifice anything—such as a husband and two children and a reputation—for the sake of her 'one great love.' The teen-ager does not just see Jane Russell dancing somewhat grotesquely in "The French Line." He or she also reads that Jane Russell is perhaps the most 'deeply religious person in Hollywood' who reads her Bible and prays faithfully every day. The role and the star mutually interpret one another.

The teen-ager is not alone in so far as he depends on some source of interpretation by which even the contents of the movies are evaluated. The young adult is often just as dependent on his social circle who read *Time Magazine* or *Newsweek*. Together with his group he judges what is good and what is to be held in low esteem and he is under considerable, but subtle, internal pressure to conform to their general evaluation. The intellectuals often display this same subservience to some pundit such as John McCarter of the *New Yorker*, or Bosley Crowther in the *New York Times*.

If there is a hiatus between the parents and the children as to the evaluation and appreciation of the motion pictures much of it can be understood in terms of the different sources of interpretation molding the opinion of each. Each group has what the social psychologist calls a 'peer group,' that is, some group towards which they look for approval, for standards as to what is to be valued and what disapproved.

Would it be an error to maintain that so far as Protestantism is concerned, and there is some evidence that Catholics have the same problem, the church is impotent with respect to being such a peer group? Is it not true that the religious press has defaulted from motion picture criticism and interpretation, indeed with any concern for what Gilbert Seldes has called 'the lively

arts'? And yet, religion has a charter, so to speak, in its understanding of the nature of faith as an interpretation of the world, to be just such a 'peer group,' not in the authoritarian sense, but in the theonomous sense. That is to say, the church should not seek nor welcome the substitution of one set of authorities by another, the difference between them being only the line of interpretation which is to be followed. Religious commentary is interested in developing the critical faculties of the believer and releasing him from his compulsion to form acceptable opinions in the light of some 'peer group' in his culture whether it is the opinion of the gang, the young executives, his colleagues or his fellow workers. Religious commentary aims at providing a perspective which liberates the believer from uncritical attention to the many, many 'secular' perspectives which he is under compulsion to share. Religious commentary is directed at the creation of independent judgment which is to say, in religious language, that a man is justified by his faith and not simply the faith he has accepted from another.

This is not individualism in the bad sense of the word. Such commentary presumably proceeds from a community with a tradition (with dogma?) but a community in which the individual is not coerced to conform but which he joins freely because he finds his being fulfilled in it and because it offers in main outline an interpretation of life and death which illumines human existence for him.

Can the type of commentary which might be forthcoming if this thesis were accepted be more positively designated? I believe that it can. It would concern itself with—hoping not to be misunderstood—theological interpretation of the images, motifs and themes that re-appear in the different *genre* of motion pictures—Westerns, melodrama, musical comedy—which our industry has developed. It would analyze and comment upon the different forms of human existence that are projected upon the screen and would seek to discover their meaning for the various groups which we have delineated.

It might attempt, for example, to discern what constitutes courage in the movies and what type of anxiety it seems to dissipate and resolve. Is it a means of self-assurance that one is admired or loved? Commentary might inquire as to the meaning of the fact that religious drama seems almost of necessity to be wedded to the pageant and the spectacle. Does this spectacular character provide the sense of grandeur and awe which is sought for in religion or does it suggest the inadequacy of both audience and industry to handle the genuinely personal and poignant nature of religious faith? Why is this so?

Commentary might ask as to the significance of the western hero—or his counterpart, the 'private eye'—who has the omniscient power of distinguishing justice from injustice and who dispenses the appropriate rewards and penalties without recourse to law or inner doubt as to his ability to do so. Does this imply that Americans secretly admire the vigilante?

Commentary might ask a more obvious religious question, "what really seems to justify the life of the hero or the heroine?" Is it romantic love? Is the villain always 'alone' and unloved? What is the character of love? Does it imply risk, decision, resolution, or is it a 'passion' in the classical sense of the word, being acted upon,— "don't fight this, darling, it is bigger than both of us."

This type of analysis is, of course, nothing new. Leites and Wolfenstein, for example, have utilized something analogous to it in their book *A Psychological Interpretation of the Movies*. They isolated one motif which they called the "good-girl bad-girl" theme. It became apparent to them that one dominant image in American films was the heroine who is actually morally blameless, but who gives the appearance of being immoral, a woman of the world. Yet she is desired by the hero *precisely because of her illicit appearance* rather than for her true character. It turns out, of course, that she only *seemed* to be immoral and is finally discovered to be quite wholesome, perhaps even capable of being a mother. But the impli-

cation remains that sexual love is first attracted by the hope of a relation with a woman of easy virtue and that a virile man is relatively uninterested in sex as an expression of confidence and mutual trust.

One readily discovers this motif or its variants in the many Westerns such as the recent "River of No Return." There appears, almost without fail, the dance hall girl who possesses a heart of gold with virtue to match but who is introduced and sustained in interpretation as a singer of suggestive songs, and a dancer of no little provocation. The hero is drawn to this illicit, though only apparent, side of her character. Only after the hero has tried forcibly to take advantage of her does he discover that she is really nothing but a bewildered child at heart. The casting of Marilyn Monroe in this part, incidentally, is further evidence of how star and role tend to 'interpret' one another, at least so far as those who read the fan magazines are concerned. For until her marriage to Joe DiMaggio, much of her publicity was obviously intended to create the good-girl bad-girl image.

If we deplore this motif it is also obvious that this type of value-pattern does not lend itself to censorship. And religious commentary therefore ought not to be aimed at the elimination or suppression of such themes. Actual censorship ought to be confined to matters of egregious violations of property and morals, but not the promotion of specific moral values. The aim of religious commentary is not that of pressuring the film industry into filming movies that have values but to interpret to the religious community what the motion pictures do in fact present, a mirror of American self-understanding. The religious press can aid the believer to interpret his life as a believer vis-a-vis the interpretation of those in his culture.

Would it be an exaggeration to say that the real value which the religious commentator would like to see is creative authenticity, that is, an imaginative and artistic depiction of human nature in all of its grandeur and misery—pictures which are genuine re-creations of the human situation. A

picture ought not to be criticized because of its 'message' or 'point of view' but for its superficiality or falseness in presenting that point of view. To take a recent example, I believe that religious groups made a mistake in trying to ban "La Ronde." It should have instead been interpreted as the expression—and a tastefully accomplished one—of a tired cynicism, *ennui*. As such, was it entirely valueless for communicating the meaningless, the cynical, the self-consuming passion of love in itself and for itself?

Authenticity need not denote 'realism' in the back-alley sense of the word. There is authentic comedy as well as authentic drama, and even comedy ought not to be depreciated as a vehicle for providing insight or invoking self-transcendence and humility. (Some Protestants incidentally display such a lack in their defensiveness against unfavorable or comic portrayal of the clergy.) It is not self-evident that any of the great religious traditions are committed to the view that fiction, art, and the movies must be 'wholesome.' As Walter Kerr, the Catholic drama critic reminded us some time ago in *Commonweal*, no Christian teaching or Catholic doctrine is committed to the view that sin is always and everywhere precisely punished in this life or that there are always, as the censorship code puts it, 'compensating moral values.' It does not follow

that because the churches condemn prostitution that the movies ought not to be allowed to acknowledge that it exists.

Religious commentary is not therefore interested in any particular moral values as such, but is interested in authentic and imaginative re-creations of life from many perspectives. The artist portrays the various possible forms of human existence, possibilities which encompass faith and unfaith, love and hate, charity and degradation. None of them are completely without value in terms of enlarging one's own understanding of his unique individuality in its relation to others. The authentic artist widens our own understanding of our relation to others and therefore to ourselves. The artist gives us types, stages on life's way. The religious critic has no major concern to eliminate the types, however he may disagree, nor to level off the stages. To return to a comment of Mr. Kerr: "The great artist . . . follows the bent of human nature honestly through its aberrant as well as its generous impulses, through its virtues and vices alike, until all fall into place in a complex, but truthful, pattern." But surely it is the religious critic who must supply the pattern and not the motion pictures—how can they? It is the role of theological commentary to illuminate and relate the themes of the motion pictures in the pattern provided by faith.

---

Membership will bring the Journal, RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, to a friend for a year and keep him in contact with the frontiers of thought and experimentation in religious education and related fields. Membership will also provide fellowships in a local chapter of the R.E.A. if your friend lives in one of the many large cities which have chapters.

To provide a gift of membership in the R.E.A., fill in the blank below and send with check for \$5.00 to the New York office of the R.E.A. If received in sufficient time, the office will send notice of the gift, along with the Nov-Dec. 1954 Journal, so as to reach your friend before Christmas.

Religious Education Association, 545 West 111th St., New York 25, N. Y.

I enclose \_\_\_\_\_ for a Christmas gift membership in the R.E.A.

FOR (Print name and address of recipient)

FROM (Print name and address of sender)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street and Number \_\_\_\_\_

Street and Number \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zone \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zone \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_



### III

## THE TWILIGHT WORLD OF POPULAR SONGS

ARTHUR C. MCGILL

*Department of Religion, Amherst College, Amherst, Mass.*

#### I

MAN DOES NOT live by bread alone, but in this country also by entertainment. Clichés to the contrary, this entertainment is no casual diversion, but provides a treasured source of vital life. It draws from the people considerable portions of their time and money, and, more important, absorbs their whole imaginative energies. It seems to offer them what was previously associated with religion — not just escape, but a kind of re-creation.

The most pervasive form of entertainment, that which accompanies us through the whole course of our lives — our reading and eating, our resting and travelling, our loving and loneliness — is popular music. For the average person, perhaps, popular represents only a very limited part of life, found in special places, and enjoyed by a special, highly excitable age-group. What is not apparent is the astonishing extent to which hit songs drench the American scene, and the vast industry which provides them.

First, of course, there are the phonograph records, available no longer just at music shops, but also in every dime, drug, and department store. Without considering the smaller companies which number in the hundreds, the major record firms in 1952 sold \$100,000,000 worth of popular records alone, and along with this, of course, an avalanche of affiliated paraphernalia. Next there is radio, where popular music provides perhaps three-quarters of all the material which is broadcast, and receives the exclusive attention of one or more stations in every city. On the newsstands, we meet song magazines, established to throttle the illegal bootlegging of lyrics, and selling one and a half to two million copies a month. In the cinema, a few songs may form the basis of an entire picture, or some back-

ground music may be a popular hit in disguise.

Finally there are the juke boxes. Having replaced their neon glitter with dignified respectability, these find a corner in almost every eating place in the United States, and probably devour from four to five billion nickles annually. They are equipped with a devilish electronic volume control which automatically keeps the volume of the music at a pre-set margin above the varying din of the room. Any attempt, therefore, to drown out the music for the sake, say, of conversation will only make it roar louder. At the same time there are remote-control devices that allow a customer to play the machine in the secrecy of his booth, and thus protected from disapproving frowns, he escapes taking any public responsibility for what he inflicts on his neighbor. Wherever or whenever America stops to eat, the juke boxes provide the atmosphere for digestion.

Such a complex distributing process as this is maintained by a vast production line of writers, publishers, pluggers, performers, and recorders, each one of whom is surrounded in turn by his own entourage of personnel — contact men and advisers, managers and secretaries, agents and accountants.

That the enormous size of the music business is not generally recognized is no accident, for it prefers to keep many of its statistics secret. The industry, like its product, is most effective when in the background. Here the technique is the reverse of Hollywood's. There is no frontal assault upon the public awareness with staggering figures, world premiers, full-page newspaper advertisements. Instead, just as the music industry remains inconspicuous and self-effacing, so its songs insinuate themselves quietly at strategic points in our lives, as a kind of background atmosphere — the theme song of



a motion picture, the disc jockey that precedes the news program, the juke box during a sandwich.

Night and day, year in and year out, this whole elaborate apparatus turns out about as bad a music as has ever been sung in Western society. It lacks the variety or ingenuity to arouse musical interest; it has no spontaneous sincerity to give it human interest. Therefore, the people, it is widely believed—and especially such a well schooled people as in the United States—could not possibly of themselves desire such an inferior product. The apparent popularity of this music must therefore be traced to an extraneous factor. Some hold up adolescence and its emotional disorders as the villain, for it is the young people who patronize popular music most conspicuously. Nevertheless, behind this excitable front, there lies a vast covert audience of more stolid adults. The success of disc jockeys who direct their programs to housewives, the popular music shows on television with their gentile rococo style, the continuing profitable sale of Bing Crosby records, the enormous success of hits revived from the days when the present middle-aged population was courting, and the adult craze for such crooners as Johnny Raye, who packed the Copacabana for weeks without a bobby-soxer in sight—all indicate that the popularity of this music cannot be explained away as adolescent.

Even more common is the view that barbaric business men have fabricated the whole enterprise of popular music, and that invincible press agents have foisted it upon the helpless public. Actually, however, there is no business more frantically responsive to public whims than the music industry, and no sooner does a midwestern disc jockey receive twenty requests a week for a new song than recordings of it swarm off the presses of a number of companies. Moreover, the one financial gold-mine in the music business is the song which first meets a new public fancy, and such a fancy cannot be anticipated or provoked even by the most skillful promotion. Mercury Records, for instance, vigorously plugged *Boogie Woogie Santa Claus* as its Christmas hit, but while

this flopped, the six-year-old tune used to fill the reverse side of the record was *The Tennessee Waltz* which sold four million copies. Occasionally a song like *Oh, Happy Day* (1953) may become popular without any promotion and in the face of widespread scorn from the disc jockeys.

Folk music has, of course, been commercialized since the beginning of capitalism, and has provided as attractive an opportunity for the entrepreneur as any other field of venture. The charming Elizabethan madrigals made their way by means of the same plugging that propelled *Beat Me, Daddy, Eight to the Bar*. They were promoted by slogans, like "delicate dainties to sweeten lovers' lips withal," and so crudely hawked at every church festival, May dance, and country fair that the "ballad monger" became a familiar type of rogue in seventeenth century drama. Modern song hits have a synthetic quality that distinguishes them from the usual folk music, but neither this characteristic nor their popularity can be blamed on the music industry. Somehow they actually appeal to the people, and an analysis of them may disclose the reason.

## II

In spite of the surprising variety of songs offered to the public each year, among those that become popular hits there is an appalling uniformity. In fact, when one reviews the tunes that have been popular in the last decade, it is impossible to tell from their lyrics or their music which ones are revivals from the eighteen-nineties (*When You Were Sweet Sixteen*) or the nineteen-twenties (*Together*), and which ones are current compositions. Such uniformity threatens to become unbearable, and outright monotony is avoided only by maintaining a continual succession of new performers, new styles, and new fads, only by keeping the surface of the situation in a constant ferment of change.

The craving for such persistent uniformity is something that should not surprise us. Life for most people in the United States is full of change and motion. For their work, for their neighborhood activities, for their social life, for their vacations, and for their

religious worship they must in each case go to a different place and associate themselves with a different group. Their feeling for the places and objects around them, therefore, is weak and unsure; their relation with any one person is confined to one situation and one kind of activity. They cannot stay still long enough to live deeply into one place or one friendship. Now and then, this instability is further disrupted when they move to a different community.

In the midst of such shifting sands, people try to stabilize their one possession which is not caught in this sea of change—their inner imaginings. If their dreams and musings can retain a fundamental sameness, then at least one part of their intimate life can have a kind of permanence. For such an imaginative world of stable, patterned happenings and compelling emotions, they depend on the mass media. If these do not change, if the movie plots all tell the same story, if the comic-strip situations and soap opera crises faithfully repeat themselves, if popular songs preserve the same mood—then the ordinary flitting life can find at least one source of coherence and continuity. As the directors of the mass media know, the people crave the same old thing, offered with only such variety of surface details as to prevent monotony. Any threat of fundamental change in these popular arts—like the intrusion of jazz on the musical scene—is resisted with deep anxiety.

For some understanding of the imaginative life of our culture, we might now turn to a close examination of the basic characteristics of popular music. And the one that comes immediately to mind is the theme of romantic love. This has been described, analyzed, and explained countless times, so that it might be well for me to focus on a single characteristic of the love lyrics.

The feature any love must have to be worthy even of the name is an absorbing involvement in another person. Because a sensitive awareness of the other is present in every case, we use the same word for such various things as the child's love for his parents, the husband's love for his wife, the disciple's love for his teacher. But in what

is surely a remarkable achievement, song lyrics adopt an uncompromising vagueness toward the object of their romantic passion. With deliberate care, it seems, nothing is said by which he or she might become an identifiable human being. In the course of romantic love as endlessly portrayed in our songs, after an initial period of vague unfulfilled longing, suddenly and quite fortuitously *I Meet My Dream*. The body suffers physiological changes ("My heart is down in my shoe"), the world grows strange, and all conventional aspirations are set aside (*I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire*).

Now who is it that effects such a wondrous transformation? "You and only you." But who exactly is this "you" which fills the consciousness and transfixes the mind? We are never told. Any vivid communication of her physical charms, of something as concrete as her laughter or mode of speaking is deleted. *I Dream of You*, not of *Jeannie With the Light Brown Hair*; *I See Your Face Before Me*, although it is not worth describing.

This extraordinary vagueness in the lyrics becomes more marked as the romance collapses, for the rival who brings about this disaster remains an even more shadowy figure than the loved one herself. Not only is his description restricted to the words "another," "somebody else," or, at most, "an old friend I happened to see," but his very conquest of the girl proceeds invisibly. The lover sees nothing of it, and in the end discovers it indirectly, not, to be sure, from anyone in particular. "They" tell him—the nameless ones.

On close inspection, what emerges as vividly real from this world of popular songs is neither love nor despair in any proper sense, but a group of personal feelings that rise and fall by themselves without contact with actual people. When we hear how "my heart cries for you, sighs for you, dies for you," it is my crying and sighing and dying—not "you"—that attracts our attention. The "you" is vague because for all practical purposes it is unreal, an abstract excuse for *Falling in Love with Love*, for an orgy of feeling. The thrill of being intensely

committed — this, and not the loving awareness of another person, is what the songs express. Likewise, the defection of the girl brings no disillusion, no unexpected intrusion of an actual world which shames and depresses the lover. It rather provides him with the enjoyment of a new feeling. It is as if he had become bored with the thrill of self-importance, and now sought the anguish of self-pity.

But we must go further than this, and say that the world presented in popular music is not only devoid of any awareness of persons, but is carefully detached from the whole expanse of daily life. The songs themselves openly characterize their realm as a dream world, "a sweet, improbable, unreal world," where either *My Dreams Are Getting Better All the Time* or *My Dreams Are Old and Lonely*. They actually take pains to emphasize the disjunction between romantic experience on the one hand and the actual world on the other.

If the romantic experience is consciously divorced from actual life, surely this would affect the quality of its emotions, and would somewhat inhibit *The Greatest Feeling in the World*. This is exactly what we do find when we consider the music itself. As in the case of the lyrics, there has been a single dominating element which has pervaded the vast majority of popular tunes since the early nineteenth century. This element is melancholy, and immediately we are reminded of sobbing nostalgia, (*Old Folks at Home*, *The Old Oaken Bucket*, *Ol' Man River*) or of the endless laments to separated and broken love (*Red Sails in the Sunset*, *Sweet Genevieve*, *The Tennessee Waltz*). What is perhaps not so obvious is the way in which our songs provide a melancholic mood for every imaginable situation. Whether one wakes up to the glories of nature (*Mockin' Bird Hill*) or proclaims a creed of freedom (*Don't Fence Me In*) or rejoices in college companionship (*The Wiffenpoof Song*) or invokes his love at bedtime (*Good night, Sweetheart*) or praises heroic fidelity (*Lili Marlene*) — the music creates a melancholic atmosphere.

In ordinary life, melancholy occurs when

in the midst of joys, we realize their limitations, when we remember experiences both deep and irretrievable — "so sad, so strange the days that are no more" — or when we suddenly sense the mortality of a present happiness. Because melancholy involves this peculiar fusion of joy and sorrow, it has found repeated expression in literature. What is so unusual about our popular music is that here, in a media designed primarily to arouse feelings, melancholy tinges the entire range of emotional experience. This indicates that our culture must feel some profound limitation, not in the pleasure of any particular situation, but in the pleasure of feeling as such. And the song lyrics have indicated what that limitation is: deep feelings do not belong to the actual world, for nothing there apparently is capable of arousing or sustaining them. They can be found, if at all, only in a dream world like that of popular music. When a people believes that its ordinary emotional life is condemned to starvation, every imagined experience of deep feeling will be touched by melancholy.

### III

If we turn from the songs themselves and ask about the conditions of life which they reflect, two things especially deserve to be noticed. One observes first the apparent belief that the actual relations between men and women have become bankrupt of really significant joys. The song romances lack all sense of the vibrant presence of another person; the beloved is simply the occasion for a feeling which she does not inspire. Apparently the general urban lack of confidence in interpersonal life has now extended to this last important refuge of mutual affection.

Yet the fact that the people should enjoy the mass entertainment media at all is itself a symptom of this distrust. For the most extraordinary thing about this entertainment is not its commercial character, but the isolation which it imposes on any who enjoy it. Magazine literature is to be read alone in silence, not out loud to others. Once the party turns its attention to the television screen, late comers are hardly noticed. To sit in a movie theater, where,

swathed in darkness, you may draw up your knees, is like a return to the passivity and shelter of the womb. And when the popular music is played and "the piano builds a roof of notes above the world," whether the listener lies alone late at night or sways wordlessly in the arms of a girl, he is lost in the privacy of his own dreams. Genuine works of art, of course, impose a temporary isolation because of the concentration they demand. But that isolation should be a condition of *entertainment* is indeed unusual, and betrays, like the songs themselves, a profound distrust of interpersonal life.

A second feature of the American scene is disclosed especially by the excessive emotionalism of the songs; this is the emotional apathy of its daily existence. Many aspects of our culture are affected by the effort to escape this apathy, and newspaper headlines, for instance, speak to a condition where the emotions seek to be aroused by sensation, not quieted with wisdom. In the case of the popular songs, the effort involves no attempt to dress up actual life in deep emotions; actual life is simply ignored in the song world of feelings. In other words, people no longer expect to be deceived about the dullness of life. Boredom is inevitable, and it would therefore be foolish to trick out their imagined emotions in the pretense of concrete situations. Songs should simply display lavish feelings *in vacuo*. No more can be expected. This attitude amounts to a convinced scepticism about the emotional richness of ordinary existence. No one is deceived about life by the exaggerating headlines or the emotionalism of the songs. In fact, it is usually the unsceptical—those for whom the actual world has some possibility of excitement and ultimate importance—who are revolted by the blatant unreality of popular entertainment.

We have only to take note of the kind of real-life goals and hopes in which our culture is submerged to see the reason for this emotional scepticism. Taught that a kind of natural necessity undergirds objects, events, and personal experiences, compelled to find the meaning of work in terms of income or competitive prestige, and inspired

by the overarching aim to control life through various impersonal techniques like personality display or greeting cards or petting, most people completely resign actual life over to monotonous ennui.

It would appear that the function of our popular songs is to provide us with a consciously unreal world of simulated feelings, and to engage the higher degrees of our emotional intensity, which daily life cannot absorb. It is therefore in the midst of life, during the very moments when they are enduring the apathy of daily routine that the people crave their music. The worker in the factory, the housewife at the sink, the salesman on the road, the shopper in the super-market, the vacationers in the restaurant, the school girl at her homework—all try to supplement, but make no attempt to replace, their awareness of actual life with song emotions.

Because the people have made their songs instruments of emotional compensation, these songs have lost their integrity. They do not express what is actual, but seek to arouse what is artificial. Hence they are tense, uneasy, struggling to impose themselves upon us and to engage our imagination. Like instruments, whose only meaning is to be kept by usage in continual activity, they have none of the repose of other folk music. They have a synthetic quality, not because they have been machine made, but because they are themselves machines. There is a pitiful irony here, for in the people's effort to compensate for the bleak impersonal world of synthetic techniques they turned their music itself into such a technique. For this reason, in spite of all its simulated passion, the whole realm of popular songs fades into a masquerade of emotion.

#### IV

Because the whole state of mind behind our popular music relates to attitudes of basic importance to the religious community, we must consider whether it has had an affect upon the people's fellowship of worship. Have relations between people, for instance, become as devoid of a personal quality as the songs indicate? When we examine the meaning of love of neighbor,



such in fact seems to be the case. Throughout the American scene, both in the popular religion encountered in the mass media and to a large extent in the official religion of the churches, love of neighbor is advocated as a technique to affect the world out there—to combat communism, to bring political peace, to make the constant attrition of people in city life a little more tolerable. The goal of the ethical life is not love of neighbor as such, freed from its perversions, perfected and fulfilled; not the incomparable joy of interpersonal life; and certainly not the honor of another's inviolable dependence on God. Love is only a means of achieving something else.

We hear little penetrating criticism of the motives that may be operating under the guise of love, and no large segment of the American population believes that it might be difficult, if not impossible, for any of us to apply this technique properly. All we have to do with love, as with any tool, is simply settle down and use it. In fact, we usually hear it recommended on the basis of its efficiency for doing things, not because of its moral or personal dimensions. "Hire the handicapped," reads the official postmark on United States mail. "It's good business"—a lesson Sunday school children have been taught for years. Separated from the difficulties of inner moral decisions and from the personal richness of human intercourse, love of neighbor has been divested of all humaneness, and been transformed into an impersonal technique.

But this is only one in the jungle of such techniques that submerge the religious institution. Consider some of the tendencies in religious education. A Bible story is useful because, like a scientific experiment, it provides us with data. From it a neat moral lesson can be drawn, which may be applied elsewhere to life by a student with engineering aptitude. The catechism resembles the laws of physics which we learned in school. It is a set of general principles, by which the expert figures life out, but which are too vast for the ordinary person to do anything with but memorize. While this kind of education at least gives the student manageable

bits of information which he can pull out efficiently whenever needed, it hardly confronts him with the awesome, mysterious, absolutely unmanageable God that spoke on Mt. Moriah and on Calvary.

It is quite false, however, to single out religious education. How else do many people think of their offering of money, their praying, and even their church-going itself, except as techniques for getting something else done? Don't forget, "Bring a friend to church. You both may benefit."

This atmosphere of inhuman instrumentalism severely colors American religious communities, and one therefore wonders whether it has provoked the same emotional scepticism there that we find elsewhere in our culture. In view of the popular (though not always clerically approved) church music, this would seem to be the case. First, little attention is given to the words of the hymns and anthems, since apparently few expect anything vital to be expressed by them. No discrimination is made in these words between faithful and contradictory expressions of belief, so that singing for the people is usually not part of their response to believed realities, but an important habit.

Secondly, we find recurring in the music the same melancholic mood that inspires our popular songs. Consider the enormous popularity in the Roman Catholic Church of certain sorrowful Lenten pieces, where, according to the music, the sense of sin is not felt bitterly or hopefully or sorrowfully, but with a sweet sadness. Even more obvious are some of the familiar Protestant hymns. When many churches, for instance, gather at the Lord's table, there is no "remembrance of me," no awareness of the real Person, nor of the Event with its horror and dazzling hope. All is dissolved away by the lugubrious *Break Thou, the Bread of Life*, and any feeling that "my spirit pants for thee" of any expectation that "then shall all bondage cease" is relegated by the music to the unreal dream world of sweet regret. Perhaps more striking yet is the fact that when all American Christians unite to celebrate the miracle of Christmas, their most popular carol is not a tune vibrant with joy,

but the slow and melancholy *Silent Night*.

It should be understood clearly that the pall of scepticism which operates here is not due to intellectual conviction, for people do not, at least in our time, make *conscious* discriminations between attitudes by referring to overarching ideas. In order to judge how to believe an assertion, they refer to their emotional response. If a statement rings a modest set of practical, unpretentious emotional buzzers, then it belongs to the actual world of daily life. But if it begins to prompt an intense and total response, like adoration or joyous hope, then it belongs to the regretted world of consoling dreams. Emotions in the religious life have something of the character of the romantic experience in the popular songs. They seem unreal, like a masquerade for which people are grateful, but which they do not confuse with actual life.

Whatever may be required to meet this situation, it seems to me that greater emotional clarity on the part of religious leaders and teachers is indispensable. By this I do

not mean a display of emotionalism. Exaggerated feelings have a quality of self-indulgence and artificial excitement, which makes us doubtful about the emotional adequacy of whatever inspired them. But I do mean a conscious emotional appropriation of things religious, a strong and controlled awareness in every corner of the religious life of joy or fear, of confidence or disgust. Because attention is focussed and defined only to the extent that its object is real, scepticism breeds on vagueness, and this is as true in the emotional life as in the intellectual.

The dead weight of scepticism which is now flourishing in and around the American religious communities will not be burned away by intellectual argument or factual precision. It can be met only by emotional clarity. This, like the development of any other kind of awareness, requires concentration and discipline, but for those who have the necessary gifts and patience, it offers an avenue of genuine service to our religious life.

---

Membership will bring the Journal, RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, to a friend for a year and keep him in contact with the frontiers of thought and experimentation in religious education and related fields. Membership will also provide fellowships in a local chapter of the R.E.A. if your friend lives in one of the many large cities which have chapters.

To provide a gift of membership in the R.E.A., fill in the blank below and send with check for \$5.00 to the New York office of the R.E.A. If received in sufficient time, the office will send notice of the gift, along with the Nov-Dec. 1954 Journal, so as to reach your friend before Christmas.

Religious Education Association, 545 West 111th St., New York 25, N. Y.

I enclose \_\_\_\_\_ for a Christmas gift membership in the R.E.A.

FOR (Print name and address of recipient)

FROM (Print name and address of sender)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street and Number \_\_\_\_\_

Street and Number \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zone \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zone \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_



## IV

### WHAT ABOUT THE PAPERBACK?

D. S. TILLSON

*Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York*

THE IDEA of making books cheaply available to a large public is certainly no new one. It is almost as old as mechanical printing itself. For in 1501 in announcing the Aldine Classics, Aldus Manutius wrote, "We have printed and are now publishing the satires of Juvenal and Persius in a very small format, so that they may conveniently be held in the hand and learned by heart, not to speak of being read, by everyone." Still, the history of inexpensive books begins for practical purposes in the 19th Century and late in the century too, after the development of the cylinder press and good supplies of paper, since earlier efforts were only brief and limited attempts to cultivate the upper bourgeoisie, such as the Boston chapter of the British Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge which distributed classics and "congenial essays" in New England during the 1830's.

Fifty years later the cheap paper book came into great vogue for the first time in this country, mainly through the advantages of unauthorized publication of British novels by Dickens, Scott, and others at 10c to 25c apiece. Extreme competition and price wars, an increase in postal rates, poor production techniques and rising paper costs, together with the Copyright Act of 1891, conspired to cause the collapse of this early attempt at mass marketing cheap books. But in 1890 at the peak of this period 1500 books of 5000 titles then available were paperback editions—a full 30%. (Even in 1953 when 1200 paperback titles were published among a total of 9000 books the modern paperback comprised only 15% of total titles available.)

In Europe, however, there was no decline of paperbound volumes. On the contrary, paperbacks grew in popularity on the continent to the point where they became the chief literary fare of Germans, Frenchmen, Englishmen, and Italians. Tauchnitz and Reclam in Germany became thriving industries, Reclam publishing even in England

during the 1920's. The modern paperback boom in this country has received great help from the Tauchnitz experience and the development of Penguin Books under Allen Lane in England after 1935. Penguin set up an American branch during the war. Gaining its independence in 1948 under the name New American Library, N.A.L. took as president Kurt Enoch who had worked with both Tauchnitz and Penguin. Ian Ballantine, present head of Ballantine Books, and Victor Weybright of NAL were both trained by Penguin too.

But these three men came on as reinforcements. The present-day paperback boom in America got its start in 1939 when Robert de Graff, after repeated urgings by Richard Simon of Simon and Schuster, founded Pocket Books, Inc. After selective tests of customer reaction, de Graff printed 10,000 copies apiece of ten titles including *Heidi* and Pearl Buck's *Good Earth* and succeeded in consigning them to some 300 skeptical owners of cigar, drug, and department stores in New York City. Response was quick. De Graff sold out his 100,000 books within two months. Sure of himself at last, de Graff contracted with 10,000 magazine dealers over the nation—eight times as many as used by conventional publishers—to accept his books for country-wide distribution. He had seen a real need. For with only 4000 bookstores in the whole nation, 32 million people had no access to books at all, and most of the other hundred million never set foot in a book store. De Graff procured his outlets—the untold numbers of corner stores, newsstands, and railway stations across the land—and by means of his consignment system, whereby unsold books would be fully returnable, replaced by fresh new ones, he provided an attractive financial inducement for the small retailer. The retailer would get about 6c per book sold and the wholesaler 4c; while (the books themselves costing about

13c) he himself, if returns were low, would make 2c and the man in the street would happily grab up his book for a quarter. So the boom was launched.

The coming of the war—and paper rationing—slowed up de Graff's plans considerably, but the armed services turned the paperback to their own uses. Early in 1943 the Council on Books in Wartime proposed the mass publication of pocket books for soldier consumption. After assurances were given to skeptical publishers that technical, educational, and text books would not be included in the scheme, that a 1c royalty would be provided for publisher and author, and that all books not distributed by the end of the war would be destroyed, the project was launched in May 1943 with the appointment of Philip Van Doren Stern (later advisor to Pocket Books) as manager.

The original plan was to publish 50,000 copies monthly of each of 50 different titles, the books to be one half *Reader's Digest* size cut horizontally, the binding on the shorter side. Soon 155,000 copies were being printed. At the end of 1946 Armed Services Editions had published 1,180 titles, 123,535,305 books all told (an average printing of 104,700) at a cost to the Army of \$7,143,000, or exactly 5.8c a book including the 1c royalty. Thus millions of American soldiers who had never previously read a whole book became accustomed to reading. Infantrymen found themselves reading Voltaire. Needless to say, this tremendous program (averaging nearly a dozen books published for each serviceman) served to pave the way for a huge postwar expansion of de Graff's program.

As early as 1935 the eminent librarian Joseph K. Wheeler predicted the modern success of the 25c pocket-size paperback of 150 pages. But even he, no doubt, did not foresee the phenomenal postwar growth of the industry. New firms were springing up—Avon, Dell, and Popular Books during the war and Bantam Books in 1946. Annual sales soared from 60 million books in 1946, first beyond 100 million, then beyond 200 million. Sales in 1950 were 214 million books, in 1951, 231 million, and 1952 saw more than 250 million paperbacks pass into consumer hands. The

total number of volumes published rose to half that of the hardcover publishers. The number of new titles published rose in 1953 to an average of 100 a month. Paperbacks have been called the biggest new phenomenon in our postwar culture.

If the figures were still rising, they would still have to rise a long way, indeed, to match magazine statistics. *Life* alone out sells the entire pocket book industry each month by several million copies, while 1951 figures indicate that American magazine sales that year were 3,500 million copies, fifteen times the 'bookazine' volume. But paperback sales have reached a plateau in 1953 and 1954 and have even tended, unexpectedly, to drop a bit.

#### Problems

Rack space in the outlets has never been extensive enough to display all the paperback offerings, or, indeed, to display them *long enough*, for each month the wholesaler reworks the racks removing slow sellers at the same time he cleans out leftover magazines. Consequently, paperbacks must sell fast, so there is no patience for the better volume which may take longer to find its customer.

Another problem is the securing of reprint rights from original publishers. Freeman Lewis of Pocket Books and others feel that the vein of uncopyright classics is worked out, so reprinters have been bidding each other up \$15,000 for rights to one book; NAL, in fact, paid \$100,000 to secure the rights to its triple volume 75c bestseller *From Here to Eternity*. Gold Medal Books has found one solution: since 1950 GM has published many 'originals' published directly from their authors, paying them guarantees of perhaps \$3000. Another solution is the 'made' book, the 'how-to-do-it,' or the anthology which involve low royalty costs or none at all.

Experimentation in the paperbacks has ever been widespread. In 1950 Pocket Books tried issuing hardcover duplicates of its better 25c numbers at \$1.00 (called Collector's Editions). Doubleday and Simon and Schuster, both hardcover publishers, tried issuing some of the bestsellers in oversize \$1.00 papercover editions. Though these experiments have been abandoned, Modern Library's *College Editions* at 65c and 75c and the similar

*Rinehart Editions*, both started after the war, are doing well. A third series of this type, Doubleday's *Anchor Books*, sprang up in 1952 and has issued some 43 titles in two years (65c-\$1.25), including such items as Ernst Cassirer's *Essay on Man*, David Reisman's *Lonely Crowd*, Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, and Bergson's *Two Sources of Religion and Morality*. This Fall a new Doubleday series, *Image Books*, has appeared; a Catholic line in the same price range, it includes books on St. Thomas, the Social Teachings of Leo XIII, and Catholic history. A third new line in this range, the first seven titles of which appeared this Fall, is Knopf's *Vintage Books* featuring works by Gide, Mann, Forster, Camus, and de Tocqueville. None of these five lines have newsstand-drugstore distribution. Hence they are published in batches of 20,000 or less (as contrasted with 200,000 batches for the quarter books) and hence their higher price.

Another experiment is Ballantine Books, not yet firmly established; this firm sprung up in 1952 has attempted to publish 35c paperbacks in conjunction with simultaneous release of the same titles by certain hard-cover publishers. Still another is the *Pocket Library of Great Art* (50c) started this year.

Experiments in distribution have been the Teen Age (Paperback) Book Club under the tutelage of *Scholastic Teacher* and the paperback vending machine. Direct mail sales and demonstration sales of religious paperbacks (*Son of Bernadette*, e.g.) by Catholics after Mass Sunday mornings in Washington, D. C. (Eugene Willging, director of Libraries at Catholic University, and others) constitute two other experiments in paper book distribution.

There are none to question the uniform high quality of the five lines of 75c-range paperbacks, but there has been moral criticism aplenty for the standards of the quarter books. Hotly competing for space both with each other and with dozens of magazines and newspapers in 100,000 drug and variety stores, paperback companies have not scrupled to employ smart huckster advertising know-how which dictates the use of lascivious cover pictures and misleading description

to excite the senses and spur impulse sales. Committees of self-appointed censors, generally without studied or objective judgment of individual works have sought removal of "obscene" literature in bulk by direct action. Local committees of the Decent Literature Committee of Our Lady Help of Christians have created incidents in Brooklyn and Chicago, while three large variety chains in Texas, for example, have banned pocket books from their stores. The paperback industry has been branded subversive of morals. What is the true situation?

It is possible to walk into a railway station, on the one hand, and to see there fifty paperbacks, not one worth the reading. It is possible, on the other hand, to walk into a college bookstore to find cartons of Hemingway's best works lying open on the floor and volumes such as *How The Great Religions Began*, by J. Gaer, *The Eternal Galilean*, by F. Sheen, *Life of the Bee*, by Maeterlinck, and *Hiroshima*, by Hersey, on the racks. NAL has 171 of its books on college reading lists.

The truth is there is a kind of schizophrenia in the industry: One finds *Forever Amber* and the *Holy Bible in Brief* not only side by side on the same rack, one finds them published by the same firm (NAL). NAL's Victor Weybright, who boasts of the famed NAL *Mentor* line, also warmly defends his murder mystery writer Mickey Spillane as a writer of "a new kind of Americana"; he believes that whatever the reader may start reading, his tastes will gradually improve and he will finally turn to the better books.

#### Best Sellers

The five bestselling paperback authors are E. S. Gardner, Thorne Smith, Ellery Queen, Erskine Caldwell, and Mickey Spillane, all 'sex and sadism' writers. In 1952 Spillane's books sold six million copies, one sixth of NAL's total *Signet* output. Caldwell's *God's Little Acre* is the all time paperback bestseller; it has surpassed the six million mark and is still selling. But side by side with records like these are figures like this: Dr. Spock's *Pocket Book of Baby and Child Care*, five million copies; Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, 800,000 apiece; Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*, 450,000 volumes; Plato and St. Au-

gustine, 500,000 copies apiece. Evidently the reading public is also far from uniflorous. Though the percentage of novels published in paperbacks has climbed to 55% (Westerns, mysteries, and novels make up some 92% of all paper books sold) the good books remain.

Perhaps we may conclude, like public, like industry; the commercial paperback industry, neither good nor evil, neither really crusading nor entirely pandering, reflects the desires of the man in the street who, bored, walks into the corner grocery and looks around among the gaudy-covered quarter books until suddenly, mysteriously, one strikes his fancy and almost by impulse he plunks down a quarter and takes the book home. On the same counter may lie *Life* and *Modern Romance*, *Ethics in a Business Society* and *The Big Kill*. The customer looks around, pays his money and picks his choice. How shall we blame the companies with their self-justifying 'balanced rack' theories and "competition" crying, that produce these books to make their living? And how blame the man? — Whose motives we don't begin to know.

#### Suggestions

We of the churches, nevertheless, would want these companies to produce more better books, would want these customers to read more better books. What can we suggest?

1. Religious leaders can influence commercial companies.

Although the pocket book companies are in business primarily to give the public what it wants, *whatever* it wants, and to increase production in order to maximize profits, and although their freedom of action is much restricted by the impartial, automatic workings of the free market mechanisms of our price-profit system, editors, nevertheless, feel varying degrees of cultural responsibility and can be influenced within the limits set by the competitive system.

This is made clear from NAL's testimony that they published Bishop Scarlett's second book of essays on Christianity "almost as a special favor to him," and that *Sweden: The Middle Way*, by Marquis Childs, was published "partly to please the Co-op people." Certainly the commercial paperback people

would think over very seriously suggestions and advice given them by church leaders or by church commissions. In fact Doubleday has embarked (this Fall) on a new paperback publishing venture in consultation with Catholic leaders — Doubleday-Image books. I do not know whether subsidization is involved.

Influence by urging and talking alone, however, is at best marginal. Modern commercial industry is ruled in the end, after all, by the dictates of the dollar sign.

2. Subsidization of commercial pocket book religious reprints by church groups.

Let us suppose that among a list of books a church group suggests for publication to a pocket book firm such a book appears as the *Mirror of Perfection* of St. Francis of Assisi. Suppose the editor to say, "Yes, I should like to publish this title. But to market it competitively and still make a profit I must keep down the unit cost to 15c; therefore, I must print 200,000 copies. But this book will be a slow seller. Who will pay for the costs of returns and the storage costs for ten years until these books are sold out? I'm sorry I must refuse." Many, if not most, of the titles desirable from the churchman's point of view would be slow sellers.

One answer would be for the interested church group to guarantee to make good any losses that the businessman might suffer on suggested religious titles, or he could subsidize certain books at, say, one fifth of manufacturing and editing costs, that is, about 3c per copy. At this rate the religious group would pay \$6,000 to get its 200,000 copies of the *Mirror of Perfection* into the secular market. If the National Council of Churches, for example, were interested in such a program, say only to the extent of ten titles a year, *two million* additional religious quarter books would appear in the market. The cost of this missionary endeavor to the Church Council would be \$60,000, or 1c for every fifth church member in churches affiliated with the NCCCA.

3. Purchase of large quantities of religious paperback reprints by church groups.

The second response to the commercial paperback editor might be "All right, we



(ourselves) will buy 100,000 copies of the *Mirror of Perfection* (at cost: 15c)." The aim here would be not only to provide the secular market with tens of thousands of missionary copies of a religious book which would not otherwise be published, but also, simultaneously, to provide the church groups themselves with valuable inexpensive religious reading and study materials.

One would think that this type of project could be utilized very extensively. Bishop Scarlett of the Missouri Episcopate purchased and distributed in his diocese alone some 30,000 copies of one of his quarter books of essays on Christianity, some 50,000 in all of the two books which he edited. Now the National Council of Churches represents more than 30 million members in 150,000 churches. One would expect that an organization of this size, for example, could quickly absorb many times this number of copies of a given title and engage repeatedly in this type operation with great spiritual benefit to all concerned.

4. Publication by church groups themselves of inexpensive religious reprints.

An alternative to dealing with commercial houses is for church groups themselves to reprint classic and popular religious literature. Using our example of the National Council of Churches, the Joint Commission on Missionary Education might take up the work through its Friendship Press. Distribution could be through (1) the pipelines of the Press's 30 member denominations, or (2) the NCCCA's 500 city and county church councils or nearly 2000 affiliated ministerial associations, or (3) directly to those of the 150,000 NCCCA affiliated home churches which would participate. The same type of program could be worked out with much less difficulty by the Catholic Church.

One would think that programs of this nature would offer almost limitless opportunities for initiative and for spiritual benefit.

#### *What Next?*

We do not know what has caused the renaissance of the paperback book in America. Is it better reading ability? more leisure time? or greater financial pressures upon the intel-

lectual? Nor do we know the future of the paperback. Will sales permanently stabilize at existing levels? Will they begin to rise again as so many in the industry predict? But one basic economic fact of the paperback industry we do know: *We know that paper-covered books about 200 pages in length can be produced in quantities of 200,000 copies at a unit cost of about 15c.* And this basic fact raises for us in the churches one basic question: Shall we allow the industry growing up around this fact to be used to pander to our lower instincts, our impulsive tastes and our superficial day dreams? Or shall we put it to work in improving our tastes, educating our instincts, reforming our spirits and rebuilding our souls in conformity with the will of God as we see it?

The commercial paperback industry itself will never in a million years bring us into the Kingdom of God. The industry itself is sluggish and indifferent to the hope of the spirit, inert and mechanical, obedient to the laws of supply and demand, to cost-price-profit ratios, to the cold competitive facts of the market place. Left to itself the industry, we expect, will scarcely go beyond disgorging its mountains of good books and bad books on our nation's hundred thousand bookstands where they will lie in confusions before us, where chance, impulse, and titillated instinct will determine reader choices, the reader scarcely aware of it. The potential reader will be led to read; but whether he will be led to read *upwards* or whether he will be led to read *downwards* . . . this determination is left to the mercy of circumstance. No one is present to guide him in his choices.

It is for the churches, therefore, to take positive interest in this key mind-forming industry—as we have *failed*, generally, to take interest in numerous others (the movie, TV, comic magazines, radio, advertising) like it. And it is for the churches to endeavor with all their strength to turn the paperback industry, insofar as they are able, to their higher purposes before the present time becomes time past and before this young industry becomes old and formalized and it is too late to do anything constructive.

# V

## The Curse of the Comic Books

### THE VALUE PATTERNS AND EFFECTS OF COMIC BOOKS<sup>1</sup>

FREDRIC WERTHAM, M.D.

*Author of Seduction of The Innocent, New York City*

*Young reader, would you know whether the tendency of a book is good or evil, examine in what state of mind you lay it down. Has it attempted to abate your admiration and reverence for what is great and good, and to diminish in you the love of your country and your fellow creatures? Has it addressed itself to your pride, your vanity, your selfishness, or any of your evil propensities? Has it defiled the imagination with what is loathsome, and shocked the heart with what is monstrous? Has it disturbed the sense of right and wrong which the Creator has implanted in the human soul?*

—Robert Southey

#### I

DO YOU KNOW what Necronomicon is? Probably not. But for thousands of children this is part of their education. They know that a Necronomicon is a creature that, of course, drinks people's blood and eats their flesh. Maybe you don't know either how one stops a man who is drinking a child's blood. That is easy: a man with a crucifix chants prayers while another man stabs the vampire through the heart. The comic book that imparts this lesson has an advertisement: "The way of the Cross leads home." Let me conclude this little quiz about what we give our youngest children to read with a last question. Why does a woman leave her husband? You may not know; but many little boys and girls could tell you: She is sexually attracted to a big, black gorilla — "I must go to him!" she says. "I must!"

For years now parents, educators, doctors, child psychologists and moral and religious teachers have permitted good children to be exposed to this kind of reading, indiscriminately and in enormous numbers. A typical episode will give the picture. Recently a family, obviously highly respectable, was on its way to Sunday service. The parents carried prayerbooks. Their two little girls followed clutching crime and love comics.

<sup>1</sup>From the Lafargue Clinic, St. Philips Parish House, New York City.

When I first became aware of comic books (while I was director of the Bellevue Hospital Mental Hygiene Clinic, the largest mental clinic in the country) I paid no attention to them. My assistants and I studied children very carefully and off and on we made the observation that children who got in some special trouble were especially steeped in comic-book reading. But at first we did not put these observations together. No child ever mentioned comic books as an excuse for delinquent acts. They took such reading for granted. So, evidently, — and without knowing the contents — did the adults. When I asked those who deal professionally with children about comic books they did not know, nor care, what was in them. They had no idea how much time children spent reading them. They assumed that since they were called "comic" books they must be humorous. Several years passed before I decided to study comic books systematically.

This turned out to be hard work. Comic books are badly printed, hard to read, on cheap paper. The drawing is mechanical and bad, the colors ugly, the language sparse and poor, the spelling often wrong, the intellectual and moral level unbelievably low. To study the effect of such "literature" on children we employed all the modern methods of child psychiatry and psychology. In my book *Seduction of the Innocent* I describe in



detail the methods, with results and case histories. For this research I had the active assistance of psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, psychologists, teachers, probation officers, remedial reading teachers, speech experts and others. We had no preconceived notions, — except that for a time we tended to *underestimate* the bad effects comic books have. Now, after study of a very large case material of every type of child, we know better.

Of course there are always people with a ready retort. They say that children have always had sub-literary trash and fare and that comic books have nothing new. They couldn't be more wrong. Comic books, says Kingsley Martin in the *New Statesman*, "amount to the most extraordinary experiment in children's education that the world has ever known."

## II

Comic books are an entirely new phenomenon for three reasons. In the first place, their number is staggering. They have reached at times the number of 90 million a month. More money is spent on them than on all the textbooks in primary and secondary schools together! Their distribution by methods fair and not so fair is more efficient than that of any type of literature, ever. Comic books are to be found in stands and stores in every city, every town, and even in the smallest villages. Distributors are not only efficient, they are ruthless. When small store owners, from good sense or decency, try to refuse comic books they are apt to suffer from retaliation: they cannot get the good magazines they want at all, or they get them too late to sell. Of course the big distributors who make the huge profits try to deny this; but it is amply demonstrated all over the country. Even laws have had to be made against this practice. The proprietors of some stores and stands have found the only solution to be to send back unopened entire bundles of comic books, since it is impossible to read them and sort out good from bad. Adults could do a lot to protect children by praising and patronizing such dealers.

Secondly, the content of the majority of comic books is something new that has never

happened in such concentration and profusion before in any children's literature. The ingredients spelled out, pictured and glorified, are violence, cruelty, sadism, crime, beating, promiscuity, sexual perversion, race hatred, contempt for human beings. A veritable devil's brew for the growing child! No other children's literature in the world's history can even approach it. Dime novels, sometimes quoted by the thoughtless, were practically the opposite as far as morality is concerned. Gehman has well described and documented in one of his informative articles. Some topics are characteristic for comic books: the injury-to-the-eye motif; the blood-sucking motif; the desecration of the dead by sex and violence (real necrophilia is illustrated in children's comics; there is even a "Miss Corpse 1954"); the tying-up-of-a-girl motif (especially tying of her hands behind her back); the stomping motif (kicking in the face); the branding motif (especially of girls); the slugging- or shooting-a-policeman motif. Nobody can understand the crime comic book problem if he does not make clear to himself that all these subjects depicted in graphic detail enter *millions* of homes, whether parents know it or not. There is a harmless little Teddy bear in the Christmas number of a comic book. It belongs to a blind boy. The child's father rips out the Teddy bear's eyes so that it cannot see either. "There's nothing wrong with that!" say the comics publishers. "Have you read the end of the story?" I have. The Teddy bear tears the father to pieces! That is the modern way to teach a child — a *young* child — that good triumphs over evil. Another ingredient of comic books is description of every conceivable crime, every method of concealing evidence and every way to avoid detection. That is why they are real primers for crimes and delinquencies.

The third reason comic books are a new phenomenon in children's literature is to my mind the most sinister one. In former times smut and trash were frowned upon in children's reading. Either it was actively combatted or it was minimized, curbed and barely tolerated. Nowadays it is not only defended, but is actually praised as being good for

children! This is the circumstance that prompted me to accept the invitation to write an article on crime comic books for *Religious Education*, for what has happened in the field of comic books may happen in other fields as well.

Anybody who is unbiased and who really examines comic books will find something seriously wrong with them as food for children. Dorothy Thompson recently summed the matter up and came to the conclusion that "the harm done is incalculable, even if it results in no overt acts, and even if at last it is overcome by other influences." She has no doubt that "the craze for the 'good' (or harmless) as well as the bad (comic books) contributes to the arresting of normal development." Yet the comic-book industry has found educators, psychiatrists and child experts who are willing to defend crime comic books with an array of high-sounding arguments. (In *Seduction of the Innocent* I discuss them in some detail.)

### III

Perhaps the most insidious of these arguments, and one deserving to be fought at every step, is the claim that only unstable children who are insecure, or otherwise predestined or preconditioned, are adversely affected by comic books. That gives adults complete leeway to corrupt children wholesale for commercial reasons. Obviously, one cannot make any hard and fast rule according to which children can be divided into *stable* or *unstable*. Every normal child is immature, growing, and to that extent unstable and vulnerable. And even if he does nothing wrong, temptation exposes him to emotional conflict and that coupled with other factors may do him subtle harm, immediately or later on. The first modern psychologist, Saint Augustine, was well aware of this. He pointed out the effect of mass seduction by public spectacles on an immature mind, especially in the direction of unconscious fascination by sadism and violence. The neo-Freudian defenders of comic books would like to deny the important role played by *social* temptation and seduction, which St. Augustine was first to point out. They would like to restrict evil influences to the earliest years of life, failing to realize that

the home is not only an influence but a target for outside influences. The home has to be protected as well as the children.

Sometimes I am asked: "Don't you think that comic book problem is a complex one?" No, I don't think so. If you refuse to be confused, it is simple enough. In the beginning our research was a little difficult because it was something new. Now that our results are in and have been so widely confirmed, the problem is far from complex. A doctor has no right to compromise with anything that does harm. That, I believe, is part of the Hippocratic oath.

### IV

The most important harm done by comic books is in the field of *reading*. They interfere with elementary mechanisms of learning to read and with the acquisition of the essential perceptual techniques. Reading is a very high and difficult function of the brain. The child must learn to move his eyes *automatically* from left to right along a whole line, then move his eyes back again to the left, but just a little lower than the starting-point. And he has to repeat this process, line after line, paragraph after paragraph, page after page. If the reader does not know a word, or wants to stop for a moment to think, he must be able to do that and then resume automatically, from left to right. All comic books, regardless of their content, interfere with this. Children become picture-gazers, because they can get the main points of the stories from the pictures alone, without bothering to read the words,—except perhaps a few scattered here and there upon the page. The text is always printed only in capital letters, and that is also a great hindrance to learning to read printing in a book. The text is massed in balloons with handles; there are no proper lines which have to be read clear across the page, from left to right. Arrows connecting one picture with another,—in Superman-DC comics, for example,—sometimes go from above down, or even from right to left—that is, in just the *opposite* direction from that which the child learning to read should follow. These are just some of the things that interfere with learning to read. They are part and parcel of the comic book format. From this point of view,

therefore, *all* comic books are a plague to young children and lead directly to reading disorders and indirectly to all kinds of emotional maladjustments and even to delinquency.

Reading disorders are at present enormously widespread. We find them in elementary schools, high schools and colleges. They are often not discovered. They are also apt to be hushed up, especially in colleges. They have different causes; but one cause is the comic book. So-called "good" comics are especially pernicious in this respect because they are "read" by the youngest children. Reading disorders are frequently diagnosed only after the child has struggled in school for years and years, after he has developed inferiority feelings and has failed in serious efforts to catch up in his studies.

We have found a new reading disorder caused directly by comic books, *linear dyslexia*,—linear because the subject fails in reading lines quickly and regularly from left to right. Other symptoms are slowness in reading, poor spelling, language disorders, poor pronunciation and other defects. Linear dyslexia is widespread. Children, even in good homes where they have many books, do not outgrow it. It can only be helped by specific remedial reading training by qualified remedial teachers. With this treatment it can be cured; but of course this special treatment is available only to a few children. In *Seduction of the Innocent* I devoted a whole chapter to the problem of reading. My conclusions have not been challenged by experts. What Dorothy Thompson writes, namely that "the habit of reading is usually acquired early or never acquired at all" is literally true. I would like to ask the readers of this magazine, what moral right do we have to deprive so many children of a whole generation of the wholesome influence that comes from reading good literature? Why must we give to children the products of the cheapest printing process now known?

On a higher level comic books harm children's reading by destroying the appreciation of good literature. Reading crime and love comics creates a taste for the cheap, the vulgar, the shoddy, the violent, the immoral. More important, a whole series—Classics

Illustrated—mutilates the good literature itself. In these "Classics" comic books great books are processed in a very simple manner: all that makes a book really great is left out. The child gets the idea that he has read classical literature when in fact he has not. And he loses any taste even to read the real book. This deprives him of one of the most important props for a good, socially well-adjusted life. It is a tragedy that this is not only permitted, but even defended. Recently I met a young teacher who had been brought up on comic books. When—as a *teacher*—she had to take an advanced course on Shakespeare, she read the "Classics Illustrated" versions because she "had no time" to read the plays themselves! That is how an evil spreads.

## V

I should say a word here on the subject of religious comic books. The idea that good comic books are a substitute for and will crowd out harmful comics has not worked out in all these years. Children are conditioned to strong fare by the ubiquitous bad comics. In a recent study of the reading of 250 pupils in which the investigators had established very good and confidential relationships with the children, only one pupil was found who read religious comic books. The Bible in comics form is often quoted—by the comic book publishers. Not being versed in theology, I cannot discuss this from a theological point of view. But to the extent that the Bible is great literature, the comic book format in all its ugliness destroys it. Why should we give it to children in such degraded form? The Bible in balloons is sheer blasphemy. "It's just in fun, Delilah!" says the comic-book Samson. Do you find in the Bible such familiar comic book expressions as "Take that for justice!"? The story of Ruth is illustrated with a maternity home scene, with Ruth in a maternity bed: "Your son, Boaz!" "Yes, Ruth!" The story of temptation has this dialogue:

Eve: "Just one bite! That can't do any harm!"

The Snake: "Ha! Ha! She's tempted!" In the story of David and Goliath the emphasis is on Goliath's cut-off head.

Comic books do widespread harm to chil-

dren in the ethical sphere. Of course one does not find this if one looks only for crude immediacies. It is not true that a child reads a comic book one day, then does something wrong on account of that the next. Very often the child may not do anything wrong at all; but the damage—serious and lasting—is there nevertheless. There are psychiatrists who think the consideration of ethics is outside the sphere of scientific psychiatry. In the early Freudian era there was hope that a psychopathology could be built as a natural science without regard for ethical values. But this hope has not been borne out. You cannot understand the mental health problems of a child if you leave out the ethical aspects of his development. Undermine his ethics and you undermine his mental health.

#### VI

Much of what passes today as official child psychology is faulty for two reasons. In the first place it disregards ethical values, which can and should be taught, and which can be and are vitiated by outside influences. Instead of appreciating the role of ethics, it puts all the emphasis on the "necessity" for unbridled self-expression for the child. Secondly, it is obsolete because it disregards the enormous influence of mass media, especially comic books. One of the organizations most open to criticism in this respect is the Child Study Association of America which for years has defended crime comic books. To the reader of this magazine who wishes to understand how crime comics have been able to come upon us and what still sustains them, I suggest a simple test which will permit him to use his own judgment. Let him look at the illustrations in *Seduction of the Innocent*. Then let him compare them with the section on comics in the new book *Your Child's Reading Today* by the Consultant on Children's Reading of the Child Study Association of America (published by Doubleday and Co.), and with the section on comic books (and similar subjects) in the *Encyclopedia of Child Care and Guidance* by the former Director, now Consultant, of the Child Study Association of America (also published by Doubleday). Incidentally,

some of the illustrations in *Seduction of the Innocent* were endorsed in the original comic books by the Child Study Association. How can we expect the average mother, who is doing her best, not to be misled and confused by these endorsements and this questionable child-guidance literature? For example, a Superman-DC, Child-Study-Association-endorsed December 1954 comic book has an advertisement promising a "skinny" boy that he can gain "35 pounds of muscles" by ten minutes' exercise a day. Is this true? Is that ethical? Is that fair?

#### VII

The connection between crime comic books and the more violent forms of juvenile delinquency is now well established. There are enough cases in *Seduction of the Innocent* to remove any doubts about that; but new ones have been coming up so constantly that the case is proved to the hilt. As Walter Lippman writes in his piece on "The Young Criminals," "The comic books are purveying violence and lust to a vicious and intolerable degree. There can be no real doubt that public exhibitions of sadism tend to excite sadistic desires and to teach the audience how to gratify sadistic desires."

Recently the Police Commissioner of Philadelphia, Thomas J. Gibbons, stated that the crime comics teach children "refined cruelty to human beings." The Chief of Police of Washington, D. C., has stated: "A steady diet of violent crime in the form of . . . comic books is fed to our young people day after day. . . . I think it is reflected in the serious personal assaults that we come in contact with." New York City Police Commissioner Francis W. H. Adams stated that many of the "terrible crimes" committed by youngsters during the last few weeks were the direct result of the influence of crime comics. And Corporation Counsel Adrian P. Burke added: "You'd think those kids were using those comic books for a script!" My own researches went in the reverse direction: I studied these scripts and the children, and predicted the prevalence of just such crimes as far back as 1947. Unfortunately we have permitted reality to catch up with my predictions.

The district attorneys make up the group



that has to face professionally, head on, the serious forms of delinquency now so frequent. It is not pleasant to have to prosecute these misguided youths while the psychological instigators and accessories, the comics publishers and the large distributors and printers, evade justice. At a recent meeting in Cincinnati, the National Association of County and Prosecuting Attorneys—comprising the district attorneys of all the states in the Union—passed a unanimous resolution stating that comic books are "a contributing cause to the problem of juvenile delinquency and the alarming increase in crimes of violence among the youth of today." They recommended legislation designed to prohibit the sale of crime comic books to children. Should not the moral and religious teachers of the country give their open and public endorsement to such a well-informed group, instead of falling for the false alarm about "free speech" raised by the Civil Liberties Union with regard to comic books? Free speech does not mean—and never has meant—that you can tell and sell anything you please to a child.

#### VIII

In the light of all this, the recent public indignation about some particularly violent crimes by youngsters in New York seems to me to be sheer hypocrisy. Nothing that those teen-agers did was new. We adults have been teaching it all to them, over and over and over again, in easy lessons in innumerable comic books. A man is kicked in the face—or stomped in the face—and killed; girls are whipped for sexual pleasure; a man is drowned; victims are branded with cigarettes or soaked in gasoline and burned; Negroes are attacked. These are crime comic plots. And they have been presented to children in fully illustrated and glorified form, for years. As I pointed out in a chapter on advertising in comic books, even the whips for beating the girls can be bought by mail from comic book ads. Aren't we adults accomplices and accessories in all these crimes? We have permitted—and are still permitting—their teaching.

Comic books do great harm also to children's sexual development. Can we really

hide our guilt by blaming the home, the mothers and the children themselves, instead of standing up openly against the handful of comics publishers and large distributors who have made contributing to the delinquency of minors such a profitable industry?

Ruthless violence and unscrupulous shrewdness combine to form the ideal of crime comics, whatever their variety or disguise, from *Crime* does not pay to *Superman*, jungle, Western and space comics. These are the means with which to get power, money, girls, cars, sex, and with which to evade any personal or social responsibility. Brutality is supposed to be manliness. As Kingsley Martin sums it up: "Comic books teach that everything that Christ taught is 'sissy.'"

Where do people think sexual perversions come from, especially those like sadism which are socially dangerous? We know that they come from early influences on the child and the adolescent. Comic books for years have been providing a constant stream of images associating sex with violence and sadism. This we continue to permit right now to influence the minds and the imaginations of children. Dr. William Wolf writes in the *American Journal of Psychotherapy*: "Comic books distort, exploit and vilify the normal sex drive . . . so that ordinary sex life becomes a pale, wan and ridiculously tame experience."

Except for my book *Seduction of the Innocent* there has been no mention by any comic-book critic or writer of the subject of masturbation in connection with comic books. But I don't see that we adults have a right to hush up this subject. It is true that the physical aspects of masturbation have been exaggerated out of all proportion; but when accompanied by sadistic, masochistic and other perverse fantasies, it plays an important role in the life of children and adolescents. It may cause intense and most painful emotional conflicts. Perverse fantasies and wishes may become reinforced. Soldiers and young adults have told me how they found comic books veritable manuals for masturbation. That can be understood only from looking at the comic books. They stimulate morbid sexuality again and again with-



out leaving any other outlet. Have we the right to leave children unprotected against such influences and hide our inactivity by saying that temptation has no effect whatsoever if the children have "proper home training"? Why can't we have proper home training *and* full protection against bad influences?

## IX

Frequently I am asked by moral and religious teachers, ministers, clergymen, priests, what they can do about the corruption of children by comic books. Once a child has gotten into trouble, a lot can be done. I am a great believer in psychotherapy, both by psychiatrists and by others who are trained to give it. Most delinquent behavior is transient. The overwhelming majority of juvenile delinquents—I would say almost all of them—could be fully rehabilitated. The same is true of all kinds of emotional maladjustment.

The question of prevention is different. I assume I can express myself frankly on this vital matter in this magazine. Comic books are the greatest indictment of American education. That includes moral teaching. When we ask what can be done now, we must first face the question of what we have done—or not done—up to now. It is my belief that to have permitted this comics corruption for years, and to continue to permit it, is the great guilt and responsibility of all the moral and religious teachers of this country. For it is going on right now and is reaching into every pore of our society and into every hamlet in the land. Never before in the history of civilized countries have moral teachers been more deficient in their duty to the young. They have talked about morality being a matter of the home, about well-brought-up children not going astray; they have repeated the pseudo-morality and pseudo-science about children needing "release for their pent-up aggressions." It is all very well to say that moral upbringing begins in the home. But it is equally true that it cannot end there.

The modern child's real operative environment is larger than the home. The present-day good, well-trained child meets outside in-

fluences early in his life. Often he encounters comic books when he is only 3 or 4 or 5. He may not understand all the specific implications, but seeds are sown nevertheless. Even in many "good" animal comic books the animals glorify violence and delinquency. In a recent Disney comic book, published by Dell, two fires are set, one involving a schoolhouse, and we learn—believe it or not, five times that little Pinocchio suffers from chronic gonorrhea! When the child is a little older he gets the full course, of crime, love, sex, horror, jungle, Superman comic books.

The public has been grossly misled about these things. One of the most misleading pamphlets (which is saying a good deal) was published by the Public Affairs Committee and written by a paid agent of a crime comic book publisher who is also an official of the Child Study Association of America. The public needs responsible guidance, true information and moral action. *Of course* there are other evil influences to which we expose children. That does not mean that we should take for granted, and do nothing about, the comic book pest, which is one of the worst, the most far-reaching. I have heard responsible moral leaders and educators say—both privately and publicly—that comic book control would interfere with freedom. Evidently they think that to allow an industry to seduce children is democratic, while to prevent an industry from seducing children is undemocratic!

It is a historical fact that when the New York Joint Legislative Committee to Study Comics proposed a comics control law—and even before the Legislature could act on it—The New York State Council of Churches instead of coming out against the moral corruption by crime and sex comic books publicly denounced—the *proposal of the Committee*. This is no isolated instance. It has happened again and again at PTA and other meetings that a minister got up and said that of course we know that normal children are not affected by crime comics. *How* do we know that? Whatever the relation between religion and science may be, moral teaching can certainly not bear fruit if it bases itself

on currently fashionable unproved tenets of neo-Freudianism (according to which only the first few years of life count). The building of character is a long process, and social conditioning plays an enormous role.

It would be wrong to say that moral and religious leaders have done nothing about comic books. Thoughtful sermons have been preached in churches of different denominations, and in synagogues, warning parents against the trouble comic books are causing. The magazine *America* had two outstanding articles on the cultural and moral threat of comic books. The magazine *Episcopal Churchnews* had a long and outspoken editorial; so had *The Catholic World*. And there are other similar examples. What has been lacking is action, especially action on a national level,—the only level on which real, lasting results can be achieved. That of course requires a full knowledge of the problem, with facts separated from propaganda, and documentation replacing speculation.

Some actions that have been taken are well-meant but ill-conceived,—the comic book evaluation lists, for example. Some time ago a minister wrote me from California: "I am appalled at the attitude of the Church toward this. It seems so mild to suggest a 'good' comic book list for reading!" These lists do not just represent a "mild" step. They are faulty. If a comic book character does not occur on the cover of a comic book he is not listed. That is true, for instance, of the unhealthy, violent and Lesbian Wonder Woman. Nor do the lists show that all the comic books that depict crime in any form, whether urban, Western, adventure, war, jungle, space, superman or whatnot, are *crime comics*. I made that term to cover comics that I scientifically defined: *crime* is defined by law, not by arbitrary classification. The bad and harmful features of crime comics appear in all these crime comic books. The comic-book list of the National Organization of Decent Literature prepared by the Chicago Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women is inadequate and far too complacent, though I am sure it is well-meant. It mentions "acceptable," Classics comics, disguised

crime comics like Westerns, and — worst of all — Superman, which is morally among the most harmful comic books. Even now Superman-DC comic books (endorsed by the Child Study Association of America) have premium advertisements of ".22 Cal. rifles." We teach the Superman conceit and supply the weapons to act it out. The whole Superman concept is the worst suggestion one could give to a child's imagination. Father John B. Sheerin, editor of *The Catholic World*, sums this up clearly when he writes: "The character Superman is a law unto himself, beyond good and evil."

#### X

One can only know about comic books if one reads them; one can only know about children by listening to them. I have quoted some of the many children's statements about Superman in my book. Recently a prominent member of the West German government summed up what had happened to the youth of Germany under the Hitler regime by saying: "The Germans dreamed that they were Supermen." It should *not* be considered "acceptable" that American children are exposed to the same moral disorientation which has done so much harm in the world. In this connection it is interesting that *over a decade ago* the *Catholic Transcript* deplored that Superman among other things "graphically reveals the technique of train wrecking," and recently *Commentary* described Superman as "crude, unimaginative, banal, vulgar and ultimately corrupting." With the whole world literature of heroes to pick from, this is the television hero sponsored by the Kellogg food company! In a recent TV reel Superman killed three men by throwing one hunk of metal. But there was no punishment for him, of course. That is how we seduce children.

#### XI

The Cincinnati Committee on the Evaluation of Comic Books (its chairman is a Methodist minister) makes lists which — though I am sure they are equally well-intended — are also complacent and faulty. They completely disregard the harm done by comic books to reading ability. They use the objectionable and unrealistic yardstick:

"No Objection, Some Objection, Objectionable, Very Objectionable." It is a sort of fractional approach to the problem of evil! If a comic book is rated "Some Objection" by this Committee, it is still "considered safe for use by children." That is not the medical approach. If you have "some objection" to eggs, do you still consider them "suitable" for children? From the point of view of harm done, some of the ratings are over-lenient, and the overall picture given by the lists is consequently highly misleading. For example, in 1953, they found 54% of all comic books suitable for children; in 1954 this number was increased to 59%! To give over half of the comic book industry a clean bill of health is incompatible with elementary mental health precautions, — not to speak of morality. What these lists do help is not children but the industry. The Committee has come out consistently against any legal control of crime comic books, which is the only possible way to protect children against harm.

Another very questionable feature of the Cincinnati lists is that they are published in *Parents' Magazine*. The publisher of this magazine has published crime comic books and the magazine itself has been very defensive all along about crime comics. Only recently they published again the old bromide that "the (real) focal question is what type of child is susceptible to deleterious influences and why." This concentration of attention (and blame) on the child is *not* the way to deal with a pest like crime comic books. Moreover, *Parents' Magazine* publishes *Children's Digest*, an expensive children's magazine partly in comic-book format of the worst kind.

The comic book situation is such that it is impossible to publish lists of comic books to any good purpose. Their titles change, their content changes, there are stories of different types in one comic book. The whole approach has proved to be futile and actually detrimental. Mary G. Worthley, who studied the comic book situation in the state of Maine summarizes what is true for all the states: "There are evils so dangerous that they cannot be fought by trying to substitute some-

thing better in their place." Compare the Cincinnati Committee with the group of 8th grade children who wrote to me from Arizona. They sent me a list of 44 comic books with their judgment: "No Good." How much more morally forthright the children are! Should we not emulate them? Should we not give them the help, the social help, they need instead of ascribing to them all sorts of intrinsic, individual hostilities which we have stimulated them into?

The claim has been made that comic book publishers do not need the advice of those concerned with the moral training of children. They say that they are educators themselves. What is the record of some of them with regard to the literature they publish for adults? The comic book publisher who proclaims that he publishes only wholesome comics prints in some of his adult magazines advertisements like this:

Mental Superman Overnight!

or

"Dollie's Dilemma"

Captive Cartoon Serial: Cruel  
Madame Domina and maid Mitzi,  
bind, gag, and torture Dollie  
... Illustrated ...

## XII

According to my studies it is erroneous, and at present no longer honest, to assume that a child in Sunday School or a similar place of moral training is a *tabula rasa* coming directly from an ethically sheltered home. The seeds of evil have been sown in these children. What is remarkable to me is not that delinquency is high, but that children are so resistant, that not more of them are affected by all the glorification of vice and violence to which we expose them. Do I seem to exaggerate? The unbiased reader can form his own judgment. If we take only outspoken crime and horror comic books, — which is by no means all the harmful comics, — the industry produces and distributes some 15 to 20 of them a year for every single teen-ager! There are 22 million teen-agers in the United States. I just bought an Autumn 1954 comic book in a little country store. Children come in here and buy ten at a time. Amidst violence galore is a story

where a boy kills his younger brother because he has "an undeveloped brain." As he hits him "again and again and again and again (sic!) with a blood reddened stone" he says:

"Killing poured out of me like music."

The lesson in violence is completed by an alluring premium advertisement of a ".22 Cal. Rifle." A half-page advertisement says:

"Be Lucky in Love! Will your next move be the smart thing? Don't be a Faux Pas!" (sic!)

Underneath this is another half-page advertisement in screaming letters:

"With God all things are possible!"

I would like to ask the readers of this magazine whether they could imagine any better and surer method of causing moral disorientation, moral confusion and moral disillusionment.

Do I need to give more examples? An ordinary comic book (also Autumn 1954) has the story of a 16-year old girl who is raped. The sheriff arrests an innocent youth, beats and tricks him into a confession. The youth is lynched and beaten to death—"crunching crushed bone." In the end it turns out that the sheriff was the raper; he threatened the girl with death so she wouldn't tell and he can continue his career as sheriff—and raper. Whom is such a story intended for? The name of the publisher is Tiny Tots, Inc.

In another comic book a girl of 17 is forced into prostitution,—by her guardian. The same comic book has another story, complete with bedroom scenes, in which two high school girls are tricked by two boys by a fake marriage. We claim to be concerned about juvenile drug addiction; but we permit love comics glorifying it. The girl smokes marijuana for the first time: "Try one," she is told. "They'll make a woman out of you!" This I suppose is popular science, instructing children and adolescents about the aphrodisiac effects of marijuana.

### XIII

One of the most extraordinary statements I have heard moral and religious teachers make is that after all in comics good triumphs in the end over evil. This is what comic-book apologists have been saying all

along. The former Director of the Child Study Association of America has written in a national magazine: "The morals of the comics are above reproach" (sic!) and "Goodness and Right always triumph over evil." Nothing could be farther from the facts, as I have shown in my book. Quite apart from the questionable endings in murder, shooting, suicide and other violence, there are many stories—and whole comic books—in which every story ends with the criminal, the raper, the murderer, going triumphantly scot-free. What remains in the child's mind is that they live happily ever after. A typical story is the one about the seductive girl who commits first adultery, then bigamy, then murder, and is so successful that she is never found out and in the last picture she starts all over again.

### XIV

The comic book industry is both aggressive and belligerent. It inserts pages in millions of comic books which set child against parent, child against adult. Some time ago a minister objected to the display of lurid comic books to children in his neighborhood. Immediately a comic-book publisher threatened him with a lawsuit. The minister gave in, feeling he could not run such a risk for the sake of his family and his church. This is one of the incidents where comic-book corruption wins over decency that prompted me to write this article. There are many instances showing the efficacy of these actual and potential legal threats and the far-reaching influence of the industry. Another example: When I testified before the Hendrickson Sub Committee To Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, I stated that the Book of the Month Club had selected my book *Seduction of the Innocent* for distribution in June, and had signed a contract to that effect with my publisher. I added that this would be a good test to show the influence of the comic book industry. Would the Book of the Month Club stick to its own decision and distribute the book? Now I can tell how this test came out. They did *not* distribute the book. They suddenly reversed themselves, failed to print the illustrated announcement which they had already prepared



and did not even mention the book's existence when time for its distribution came. This should be a lesson for every thoughtful person who believes that the Book of the Month Club is an American institution beyond the reach of Superman. It should also give pause for thought to those with so much to say about free speech for children.

### XV

The advertising of the crime comic book industry is ingenious. Let me give an example, one where it makes use of prominent religious organizations. National Comics Publications, Inc. (which publishes among others such harmful comics as Superman, Bat Man, Wonder Woman, Mystery in Space, Gang Busters, Superboy, Detective (etc.) sends out reprints of public service pages inserted in their comic books. These public service pages, of course, do no good whatsoever. They camouflage the real content of the comics. These sheets go to people who have professional contact with children. The real advertising is that the return address on the envelopes in which the sheets are mailed is not the publisher, but the *National Social Welfare Assembly, Inc.* This is a very prominent organization. Whether their directors know that they are aiding in the corruption of children I do not know. But I do know that in addition to such well-known organizations as the Boy Scouts of America, many religious organizations belong to it. Here are their names: American Jewish Committee, Inc.; Board of Hospitals and Homes of the Methodist Church; Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds; Lutheran Church; National Council of Protestant Episcopal Churches; National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America; National Catholic Community Service, Inc.; National Catholic Welfare Youth Department; National Conference of Catholic Charities; National Council of Jewish Women, Inc.; National Council of the Young Men's Christian Association of the United States of America; National Jewish Welfare Aid; National Lutheran Council; National Board of the Young Women's Christian Association of the United States of America; The Salvation Army. This is the chorus

helping to advertise the fascist Superman, the Lesbian Wonder Woman and the homosexual Bat Man!

### XVI

Just now we are facing the latest grand-scale maneuver of the industry, the appointment of a "czar" and the announcement of a new code. What does that amount to? The industry will give us on some comics a "Seal of Approval." Can we give our approval to their seal?

If one looks into the facts, this is not a step toward any real change; it is an attempt to save what can be saved. I have known for some time that the industry, in anticipation of legal regulation, was looking for a prominent person of stature to represent them. Evidently they could not find one. That is to the credit of the prominent men in our society. If it were a matter of automobiles or refrigerators or washing-machines for adults, one could let it pass as just another publicity stunt. But since the mental health of children is involved, and their moral integrity, it is the duty of anyone concerned with children to avoid falling for this latest stunt of Superman. Can the leopard change his spots or the comics their balloons?

Associated with Judge Murphy in his new job as "czar" is the "chairman of the association's code committee." What are his qualifications? He is a crime comic book publisher with a long record of defending comic books. His latest product, on the stands right now in October 1954, is *Tales of Horror*. "Tales of Terror" "Guaranteed to make your hair stand on end." From the comic book itself it is clear that it is addressed to the youngest boys and girls. It emphasizes, one might say salaciously, suggestively drawn girls. It is definitely what children call a "headlights" comic. In the very first story evil triumphs in the last panel. It romanticizes all kinds of superstitions. Torture is featured: "His arms will be wrenched from their sockets!" (two illustrations, one close-up). There is a close-up of a big knife thrust into a man's face. There are murders galore; etc. This type of phony health advertisement completes the picture: "Don't be skinny!" "New kind of pleasant homogen-



ized liquid super rich in calories . . . Gains of 20 lbs. in 6 weeks . . ." (sic) Innocent children cannot be blamed if they fall for this kind of thing. But have responsible citizens the right to fall for this "chairman of the association's code committee"?

The publishers, and some large distributors, have made fortunes by corrupting the morals of minors. Now, as *Newsweek* expresses it, they have "launched a desperation bid." "Formerly," again quoting *Newsweek*, they "banded together" as the Association of Comics Magazine Publishers; now they, practically the same people, have set up again as the Comics Magazine Association of America. The comic books with the Seal of Approval were, if anything, more vicious and harmful than those without it. But editors, news commentators, clergymen and women leaders all over the country fell for their promises of a "code." Now are they going to make the same mistake again, again betraying the children they are supposed to guard? In a recent interview Mr. Delacorte, a comic publisher and president of Dell Publishing Co., said that he was president of the original A.C.M.P., but "when he saw the people he was in business with, he felt he had been used as a front." Certainly a belated confession! Of the present Association he says: "I feel it won't work. . . . No wholesaler gives a damn if you censor comics or not." That of course is one of the main points. Judge Murphy is not a "censor"; he is an employee of the industry. He receives more money than his predecessor, but that is the only difference. And with all the money it is taking from children, the industry can well afford his salary of \$40,000.00 a year and its expense account of \$60,000.00 for the same period. Mr. Gaines, another comic book publisher, said in an interview: "This is bad faith (referring to the new association). . . . The group must indicate its sincerity of purpose by writing a code that will forbid crime and horror comics. This it has not done and apparently does not plan to do." These are the words of experts who ought to know.

The comics publishers have had "codes" and "self-censorship" before, announced

with great fanfare,—but never achieving anything except to delude some of the public into thinking something was being done, and that consequently *they* didn't have to bother about it any more. Whenever people begin to show signs of doing something themselves about controlling crime comics, the publishers come out with a "code" or something to divert attention, and avert action. You do not need a code to leave out harmful ingredients from comic books. All you need is to *do* it. All this talk about "codes" is just misleading. No new principle is needed so that children will not be shown pictures where a girl is about to be raped with a red-hot poker. Judge Murphy said the new code would be "strong and effective." No code is effective by itself. Effectiveness depends on the power to enforce it, and such power is absent from the present set-up. Judge Murphy has already made a number of revealing statements, partly unsubstantial, partly objectively incorrect. He had the temerity to say that: only about 5% of the comics now published are objectionable! 85% would have been nearer to the truth. Compare this attempt by Judge Murphy to minimize the whole problem with Senator Kefauver's recent statement (in the *Congressional Record*): "Many, many comic books are depraved pictorial material of the lowest order."

The new "czar" has also stated, according to the *New York Times*, that he has never had a case of juvenile delinquency which he or any other official of his court could attribute to the reading of comic books. Considering that he sat in the wrong court for that sort of cases, in a minor adult magistrates court, and never in a juvenile or adolescent court, this is a most astonishing statement to make. Probation officers in his court, even if they had had time, did not inquire at all into comic book reading of defendants. Moreover, it is known that he personally told probation officers in the past not to talk against crime comic books, that it is wrong to think they can do any harm or have anything to do with juvenile delinquency.

Judge Murphy has chosen to come out especially against horror comic books, so-

called. That is the present alibi of the industry. It is not a good one. Horror itself would not be the worst thing, if it were presented in a decent moral setting and relieved afterwards. There is horror in Shakespeare and in classical Greek plays. These comic books are wrongly named. They should be called *depravity* comics, because depravity is what they preach and teach. Straight horror comics are, of course, most offensive to adults. But for children they are not the most dangerous. What threatens children's development most is the violence, the detailed description of literally every conceivable crime, the sadism, the morbid sexual stimulation of love comics, the race hatred, the contempt for work and family and authority, the other hate- and fear-producing features that are not so obvious. Superman, Bat Man and Wonder Woman are among the worst, and it must be remembered that publishers of "good" comics have been in the forefront of those defending all comic books, crime comics included.

#### XVII

From personal experience I know that there are many moral and religious teachers who would like to do something about comic books. They know from their own observation that this is an industry which indoctrinates with evil. They wish to help to stop it. But there is an obstacle, something holds them back and prevents them from being really effective. They do not want to soil their hands by joining in the actual struggle. (There have been notable exceptions.) That I can fully understand. But it seems to me that whether we are physicians or moral or religious teachers, condemnation is not enough. Eventually there has to be a public health law forbidding the display and sale of the comic book smut and trash to minors, to children under fifteen. No other measure has brought, or can bring, results. The County Counsel of Los Angeles County, Harold Kennedy, has been the legal pioneer of these efforts. Judge Vincent Hollaren, president of the Minnesota Juvenile Court Judges, is fighting the good fight against the diehard ostriches who want to wait for more and more proof that crime comic books contribute to

juvenile delinquency. The crime-comic-book pest has spread to many other countries. In Germany, for example, the publisher of Superman is now foisting upon German children its Supermann. I doubt whether the American people wish the rearmament of Germany to be accompanied by the moral disarmament of the children. The German Society for Pediatrics and the German Association for Child Psychiatry just now petitioned the Bonn government for a law against the distribution of American crime comic books.

Many children get into trouble through no real guilt of their own. They did not ask for crime comic books, for example. We invented them, mass-produced them, foisted them upon the children. With the assembly-line methods of juvenile agencies and courts, children often get harsh treatment after they are in trouble. Some time ago a minister brought me a 13-year old girl and her mother. The girl had gotten into some sexual escapade and was facing the Children's Court. I examined her and had her studied by social workers and psychologists. She was an inveterate reader of crime and love comics, many of which are so gotten up that they give to adolescent and pre-adolescent girls morbid sexual stimulation. Then I wrote a report to the Juvenile court, concluding that the clinic would give this girl guidance and take full responsibility for her. But the judge committed her to a psychiatric hospital for observation, — for which there was no necessity whatsoever. There she had the opportunity to complete her comic-book sexual education, with homosexual contacts and lessons. Finally she was sent off to a reformatory, — of course with more of the same. We seduce children first and then punish them afterwards.

Mammon is at the root of all this. The comic book publishers, racketeers of the spirit have corrupted children in the past, they are corrupting them right now and they will go on corrupting them unless we actively prevent it. Of course there are larger issues in the world today, and mightier matters to be debated. But maybe we will lose the bigger things, if we fail to defend the nursery.

## VI

# THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE HEARINGS ON THE COMIC BOOKS INDUSTRY

GERARD S. SLOYAN

*Dept. of Religious Education, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C.*

### I

IN OUR HOUSE it was always Lester de Peyster, Jimmy Dugan, and the Powerful Katrinka. Firmly convinced that the family policy on newspapers could have stood some basic improvement, one went next door regularly on Sundays—all around the neighborhood, in fact.

It is good, occasionally, to have been in on the birth of history. That is why a certain gratification comes with the recent knowledge that when Jake's Waiting Room at Broad and Monmouth began to carry *Famous Funnies*, and one began to tease one's mother to invest in such undreamed of, concentrated pleasure as Jiggs and Hooligan by the board foot, this was the equivalent of being a box-seat holder on the rim of a new culture. The spectacle in the arena has deteriorated badly since, a judgment on which only a Rip Van Winkle would require documentation. We are now at the point of frustration, law, and threat of sentence.

On September 16, 1954, announcement was made of the appointment of a first administrator of the newly formed Comics Magazine Association of America. The appointee, Charles F. Murphy, a former New York City magistrate, will have as his chief function the enforcement of a self-imposed set of standards for the bulk of the industry. An unfortunate circumstance attending the launching is the abstention of three of the larger publishers from the start (Dell Comics, William Gaines, and Classics Illustrated). Mr. Murphy pledged that horror and terror books will be removed from member publishers' lists immediately, saying that this had been a condition of his acceptance of the post. The operating budget for the next two years will be \$100,000, of which a substantial part is the administra-

tor's salary, to aid in removing him from the suspicion of bribes.

The action of the group is by no means unrelated to the country-wide efforts, over the past fourteen months, of the Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency. On August 4, 1953, Senator William Langer (R., N.D.), Chairman of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, appointed a subcommittee of three besides himself in part-fulfillment of the terms of Senate Resolution 89, passed June 1, 1953. Senator Robert C. Hendrickson (R., N.J.), had introduced the measure on March 4, 1953. Its passage authorized "a full and complete study of juvenile delinquency in the United States." Membership also includes two Democratic senators, Estes Kefauver (Tenn.) and Thomas C. Hennings, Jr. (Mo). The group of four lawmakers secured the services of Herbert J. Hanoach as chief counsel, assisted by Herbert W. Beaser. Mr. Beaser subsequently succeeded his superior in the post. The subcommittee chose Mr. Richard Clendenen as executive director, an able person in youthful delinquency, whose services were made available by Dr. Martha Eliot, Chief of the Children's Bureau, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The subcommittee's life was extended by Senate vote on January 27, 1954 until January 31, 1955.

This article has as its chief purpose to make available to *Religious Education* readers the testimony heard before the subcommittee on three different days earlier this year concerning the comic book industry. Printed transcripts of the court hearings are in preparation at the United States Government Printing Office. Pending their availability, the subcommittee's staff, acting through Mr. Charles V. Morris, extended to

the writer the courtesy of a thorough examination of the 586 typed pages of testimony. The writer claims no special competence in the matter under scrutiny. He hopes only to act as a faithful reporter and one sufficiently interested in a pressing national problem. The at times fragmentary nature of this report is the result of an attempt to adhere to the idea sequence of the New York hearings. The interpretations of the recorded data have no subcommittee sanction whatever. The sole authorization of the piece is that it is what one might expect from an interested observer who is also a religious educator.

## II

When Don Quixote launched on his bumbling chivalric career, his creator is at pains to explain, he was already at least half mad. This did not restrain his good housekeeper, however, from laying all the blame of adverse effect on the volumes of romance and chivalry that lined his study walls. The near impossibility of distinguishing among causes and effects did not halt the massive book-burning which took place in the back court of the Knight of La Mancha. Housekeeper, niece, and parish priest (the latter by no means a fool as a literary critic, in Cervantes' telling), consummated the holocaust of ink and noble deeds simply on evidence that his madness, however begot, had taken this romantically violent form.

On the three days when the subcommittee turned its attention exclusively to crime and horror comic books, its membership made it clear before the first witness was called that they felt they had no mandate to join the trio around the bonfire. It is important that Quixote's individual right to possess and not the authors' to publish was the matter at issue in the Spanish classic; but in any case the senators were in no combusive mood. In an opening statement delivered in Room 110 of the United States Court House, New York City, on April 21, 1954, Chairman Hendrickson indicated that to his mind "freedom of the press is not an issue." The Senator said that he did not head a subcommittee of blue-nosed censors. "We have no preconceived notions as to the possible

need for new legislation. . . . We want to find out what damage, if any, is being done to our children's minds."

He also said that daily comic strips in the newspapers were not at this time under scrutiny. Of the more than a billion comic books sold each year, therefore, the subcommittee is interested in only a fraction, namely "pamphlets illustrating stories depicting crimes, or dealing with horror and sadism." The one clear parallel with Quixote and his addiction to certain tales is the undeniable fact of violent, deviate behavior by many who happen to be addicted to comics. At the present crime rate, more than one and one-half million youngsters aged ten through seventeen will brush with the law in the year 1960. The subcommittee, said Hendrickson, is only seeking earnestly and honestly to determine why so many cannot adjust themselves to a lawful pattern.

There is no hint in all the subcommittee's action that it goes on the assumption that comic books are a major cause of juvenile delinquency. On the other hand, its members are careful to avoid stating categorically that they feel these books have no effect in aggravating the problem. The isolation of this one mass medium as a possible cause or aggravation of criminal behavior, in this paper, must not give the impression that the subcommittee so isolates it. What will be evident is that they feel quite free to weigh hypotheses against testimony. Although burglary arrests rose 20% last year and the population only 5%, with 53.6% of car thefts the work of juveniles, no simple, direct equation is argued for between these figures and the growth of any one mass medium.

## III

Mr. Richard Clendenen was the first witness to appear before the subcommittee. He spoke of "gradations in horror comics." Of the 422 titles on newsstands in March of this year (figures supplied by the Audit Bureau of Circulations and Controlled Circulation Audits), at least one-fourth were crime and horror types. Since between seventy-five and one hundred million copies are sold each month, about twenty million



are of the crime variety. This is not to say that the balance, concerned with "science," piracy, the western range, etc., are free of sex and bloodshed.

In a book entitled *Crime Must Pay the Penalty*, twenty-seven violent deaths occur in four stories. Little Lucy successfully murders her father, attaches the blame to her mother and her mother's boy friend, witnesses their electrocution (which is shown), winks at the reader, and goes off to live happily with her aunt. This is a contribution of a house trading as Entertaining Comics. Children lure inimical adults into quicksand, into a bull-pen to be trampled; humans are dismembered in full view, the gloating butchers preserving odd ears and organs in Mason jars. *Strange Tales* and *The Haunt of Fear* can mean anything in the line of sadism, and monstrosities that even nature has been incapable of.

The Atlas Publishing Group (owned by Mr. and Mrs. Martin Goodman) is responsible for forty-five to fifty comic titles, the production of which is scattered over twenty-five corporations. The slump of the Atlas syndicate appears on the books of the individual publishers. Mr. Clendenen testified that it is clear that the whole industry is in the hands of a very few persons. In putting into the record a series of research articles and reports of survey committees on the effects of crime comics on delinquency, the executive director said that there is general agreement on these points: (1) the reading of a crime comic will not cause a well-adjusted or socialized boy or girl to go out and commit a crime; (2) there may be a detrimental and delinquency-producing effect on the already emotionally disturbed child through the suggestion, support, and sanction, which his aggressive feelings receive; (3) there is every reason to believe that, as amongst youngsters, the most avid consumers of crime comics are those least able to tolerate this type.

Inevitably investigators find the worst comics on newsstands in more physically deteriorated areas. To a committee member's question about second-class mailing permits and the Post Office Department's

obscenity laws, Mr. Clendenen said that very few distributors use anything but freight or express. For them it is chiefly a matter of economy. The majority have permits, since all that is required is that the publication pass muster on the issues submitted when a permit is being applied for. The advertisements in comic books are chiefly of the mail-order novelty kind, but with a grotesque mixture of little girls' dolls, throwing knives, complexion salves, crossbows and starters' pistols. Duelling swords, whips, and blank-cartridge pistols do appear but switch-blade knives and guns with bullets do not. This catalogue describes comic books of the crime-horror variety and does not speak for the advertising content of love, jungle and western types. It is a commonplace to have a bloody tale end with an ad on the facing page providing instruments ready to hand for identical action. Mr. Clendenen said he had never found evidence of calculated moral or political subversion in these media. To his mind the profit motive is the only one consciously at work.

Retaliation against opponents of comic books was attempted in a cartoon editorial provided to Mr. Clendenen by William Gaines of Entertaining Comics before it was run. *Are You a Red Dupe?* is the screaming challenge. The reader is then told of poor Melvin Blikunken-Skovitchsky whose four-color press is smashed by the Soviets as an act against the freedom of the press. "So watch out for the joker who speaks out against comics at the next PTA meeting. We're not saying he's a Communist, but he may be a dupe. He has swallowed the Red line hook, line, and sinker." Mr. Gaines piously and patriotically avers that in America we want no censor for comics, newspapers, slicks, books, or the Bible.

#### IV

The testimony of child behavior experts in the matter of emotional effects produced by reading is difficult to evaluate. Their scientific training puts them on guard against attributing any effect to a single cause when a multiplicity has been at work. Dr. Harris Peck, Director of the Bureau of Mental Health Services of New York City's



Court of Domestic Relations described himself to the subcommittee as one who takes a middle-of-the-road position among his colleagues. He interpreted this to mean that he does not see in comic books a primary causative source of juvenile delinquency. For him they are simply an additional thrust to other forces already operating on the child. He observed, however, that psychology possesses no evidence of an inherent destructive impulse, as such, in the very young. He is convinced that the behavior patterns of children in deprived situations are violent in the exact manner that they are because "we provide situations leading to criminal outlets." Almost without exception children who need the psychiatric services of the court read crime comic books. In general, said Dr. Peck, the trend is for emotionally stable children to read harmless material and the unstable the harmful. The word "read" is used broadly, since 75% of the court cases are at least two years retarded in reading; of these, half are five years retarded.

### V

Judge Murphy, the new industry administrator above mentioned, had something resembling a tragic predecessor in Mr. Henry E. Schultz. Mr. Schultz, an attorney, is one of two remaining salaried employees of the Association of Comic Book Publishers. In 1945 or thereabouts, according to his testimony, almost 90% of the industry organized themselves and subsequently drew up a code. Mr. George Hecht, publisher of *Parents' Magazine*, was a guiding spirit in promoting the code. Although the framing of its six brief but cogent provisions preceded the present horror trend, three large syndicates left almost immediately after its publication. At the date of the hearing only twelve members remained, of whom but three are publishers. Mr. Schultz's attempts to enforce the provisions of the code (only about one-third of the industry still survived by the time he came on), resulted in so many defections as to make enforcement impossible. A previous reading of comics by his staff had been his first technique, while there were still funds. An association

seal continues to be used by members on a basis of self-censorship, but Schultz said that its use is meaningless. He finds himself turning out a monthly newsletter to members relaying clippings of attacks on the industry, and studying censorship legislation.

His generally accurate and forthright testimony ended with a denial of the reality of "tie-in sales." Comic books go to dealers on a fully returnable basis, said Schultz. They are free not to handle any titles they choose. It is only that their total sales must continue high if they are to keep their franchise. While making clear that he had no illusions about the violence and sadism that marks many comics, Schultz closed by indicating that he felt that the exorciation of printed obscenity served chiefly to gratify parents and divert them from placing blame where it properly belonged; in other words, that the investigation of the industry could easily be a playing along with parental failure. He cited the research study of Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck done at Harvard (presumably *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency*, The Commonwealth Fund, 1950), which had as a conclusion that the child's pattern of delinquency is already fixed at age six, that is, "before he is exposed to mass media." This does not take into account, of course, how the pattern once set is built upon. Many a comic book, said Schultz in conclusion, carries a crude, homemade seal saying "Good Clean Reading." The Atlas Group and Famous Funnies, whose line is at best tainted, still award themselves the seal of the moribund association.

### VI

Dr. Frederic Wertham, the author of *The Seduction of the Innocent*, was next on the stand. His clinical investigation of the effects of the comics on youth goes back to 1945. Dr. Wertham's condemnation of much of the industry has earned him many enemies. His generalizations were not always mentally neat, nor was a portion of his extemporaneous testimony as contrasted with his prepared. His general positions seem unassailable, however, and he defends them with a considerable warmth. A com-

mon-sense approach to moral problems far older than scientific methodology is his long suit. When he deserts clinical detachment he loses points in the area of debate, talking as excitedly as any man terribly interested in the protection of youth might be expected to do.

Thousands of children, according to his staff investigators, spend \$60 a year on comics. Some very poor children spend \$75. "We saw one boy in a slum candy store buy fifteen at a time."

Unlike many psychiatrists, Dr. Wertham's view is that it is primarily the normal child who is affected. The most morbid children, he testified, are least affected because wrapped in their own fantasies. The attraction of the normal to morbidities (e.g., a comic showing a baseball game with a man's head as a ball, human entrails as the base paths, a child's torso as chest-protector, etc.) was explained by the fact that American children are being saturated with ethical confusion. They must live in a miasma of concentration on such perversions, and their minds simply yield to the unrelieved atmosphere. It is impossible for a child to go anywhere today—home, dentist's office, school—without being submerged by the obscene flood. His eyes are bombarded by an endless stream of brutality, as in a single Tarzan book where twenty-two people are blinded by a Negro man. The appeal of Superman, in Dr. Wertham's view, resides in sadistic joy while the reader, through identification, remains immune. The crime is always real—Superman's triumph and that of the good are unreal.

"Friendship is for suckers! Loyalty is for jerks!" is a motto culled from a comic, illustrative of the moral code that is being inculcated. Formerly to impair the morals of a minor was a punishable offense. It has now become a vast industry. Dr. Wertham said he knew of no more erroneous theory about child behavior than the assumption that the child must be predisposed to do anything wrong. The lability of human nature or its proneness toward acting unworthily at any given time if encouraged sufficiently seems to be a psychological fact

to which little account is paid. It is so much easier to toss about shibboleths about "our fine young American boys and girls."

Dr. Wertham has no hesitation in saying that his theory of temptation and seduction is highly unspecified. If the appeal of evil is extremely general, it should not be unscientific to say so. The publishers of Superman put the proposition in form when they proclaim to prospective advertisers, "It's easy to put a yen in a youngster."

The present writer was surprised to learn from photographic enlargements that the reading continuity of an especially gory comic story called "Head Room" contained a half dozen four and five-syllable words. The fact would seem to be that the script men are trying to get some relief from the monotony of their work. Research indicates that most of the words in the balloons go unread. Some youngsters have said, "When they get the man or kill the girl I try to read a few words."

The industry cries bitterly at any talk of censorship, and yet it exercises a huge "censorship through power." Threats, libel suits, and intimations of damage come to national parent and teacher groups, large magazines which feature anti-comic book articles, and individuals. The continual affirmation of the industry's giants is that no juvenile has ever acknowledged that he committed an offense because he read a comic book. Dr. Wertham says that the completeness of their triumph resides in the fact that children will never say the reading does them any damage. Frequently in clinics, however, a youngster will say, "This doesn't harm me a bit, but my little brother gets nightmares."

## VII

Mr. William Gaines was next on the stand. A college graduate, he inherited a comic book empire from his father who launched the industry and engaged in it on the most honorable terms. The son's view of morality needs to be heard to be believed. He instigated horror comics and is proud of it. On the stand he highlighted the bitter economics of the times with his declaration that the harmless thrill of a horror story is "one of the few remaining pleasures

you can buy for a dime today." This is to overlook completely razor blades at four for ten cents, or the even cheaper jelly glass. Dr. David Abramson is quoted by this purveyor of entertainment and reading enjoyment: "They are a means whereby they can get rid of their aggressive and harmless fantasies." The senatorial investigators and their counsel pressed Mr. Gaines' professional code to its elastic outer limit:

"Then you think a child cannot in any way, shape, or manner be hurt by anything that he reads or sees?"

Gaines: "I don't believe so."

The man is not without his moral sensibilities. A strange interlude came with his resentment at an error in fact.

Gaines: "I did not start crime, I started horror."

Senator Kefauver: "Who started crime?"

Gaines: "I really don't know."

The Gaines bloc prints two and one half million comic books per month and guarantees a sale of one and one half million to advertisers. An estimated gross on sales is \$80,000 a month. \$4,000 of this is Gaines' estimated personal realization monthly.

### VIII

Walt Kelly ("Pogo"), Milton Caniff ("Steve Canyon"), and Joseph Musial, director for King Features Syndicate, appeared in joint defense of the three hundred-odd "strip men" in the National Cartoonists Society, of which Kelly is president. They were bright, amusing, and strongly opposed to censorship on the grounds of traditional freedoms. Mr. Kelly, when pressed, admitted he had no ideas about the comic book threat except to re-educate people. He and his colleagues spoke of their fraternity as an idealistic group vulnerable to censorship from many sources: readers, editors, and groups of every sort. Comic book authors generally were dealt with as marginal scribblers and sketchers of an inferior talent who took that sort of work because they wanted to, there being plenty of decent art work available. In general the piety of the strip men, which seemed to win the committee completely, bore a rather casual relation to the evening newspaper. The slinky

females who are reduced to using tobacco in their cigarettes from time to time would surely cause Messrs. Kelly and Caniff pain if the artists were ever to hear of them.

### IX

The committee members, and Senator Kefauver especially, made Mr. Gunnar Dybwad slightly uncomfortable with their insistence that the Child Study Association of America was a little less than frank in its published reports on the whole comics question. Dr. Dybwad resented their allegations keenly and responded at length and with intelligence. He has been with the sixty-five year-old parent education organization not quite three years as its executive director. Dr. Dybwad reviewed the editorial efforts of his Association since 1937 with regard to comic strips and comic books. Editorial committees of volunteer workers for the Association regularly prepare lists to aid parents in selecting their children's reading. Senator Kefauver characterized articles and reports of expert persons connected with the quarterly *Child Study* as having, in general, a "soft policy" toward comics. Statements such as this indecisive one from 1948 abound: "It is on question of harmfulness, harmlessness, or positive value of these experiences for children that the greatest divergence of opinion develops."

Miss Josette Frank, a part-time educational associate on the Child Study Association staff has been employed by Superman D. C. and National Comics at the same time that her editorial approbation appeared in them, her professional affiliations alone being given. Similar dual roles have fallen to Mrs. Sidonie Gruenberg, Loretta Binder, M.D., and Jeanne Thompson, who have received fees from \$300 monthly, to provide comic book publishers with guidance when asked for it. The senators found this ambivalence deceptive, but Dr. Dybwad hotly described it as a public service flowing naturally from their expert status. He admitted that his Association's indictments of the industry have grown stiffer since 1952 and is aware that Gaines and company continue to quote favorable comment from 1948 and before. Mrs. Gruenberg's

admissions that cruelty and sadism in print are on the increase are clear enough, but they lead to conclusions such as this: "We cannot fight what is objectionable in comics by calling for more censorship or more police guards."

### X

Mr. William Friedman, a publisher, proposed the interesting theory that no outside limit on graphic detail was desirable since, "Crime should be made as repulsive as possible." Another named Froelich indicated that 46% of his sales were by mail. He had a sad tale to tell of 80,000 copies of a picture Bible that had netted him a \$29,000 loss to date. Froelich's state of mind was one of earnest despair. He has discussed the problem with many decent, intelligent persons like the committee members: clergymen, social workers, etc. If he printed the high-class product that they in their simplicity might suggest to him, it simply would not have a chance on the market. Mr. Froelich found virtues in his work that had not previously been alleged in the hearings, namely, "a period of calm, of relaxation after witnessing or participating through reading of a violent fact." This puts large segments of a nation in the therapeutic debt of the Apostles of Abreaction.

Among the most interesting testimony was that of Mr. William Richter, legal counsel for the News Dealers' Association of Greater New York. He vigorously disputed the testimony of Attorney Schultz on tie-in sales by making the point that the returnability of items is in practice a figment. The dealer is given absolutely no voice by his distributor who chooses, packages, and delivers without the aid of a previous order. A wire-bound bundle of assorted items weighing fifty, eighty or one hundred pounds will be tossed off the truck. Recalcitrant dealers are punished with late deliveries. The fact is that no items are returnable until outdated. All invoices read "No credit for premature returns." Dealers of the greater New York and Queens areas are united under the scrappy Benjamin Freedman, chairman of their board, to stave off the flood of comics that descends on them.

They have framed a bill and submitted it to the city council against "lewd, indecent, improper items as unlawful for display or resale." They find a roadblock in the Supreme Court's adverse judgment on Section 1141 of the penal law. "In a word," said Mr. Richter, "there are no standards, no guides, no proper definitions of what is lewd or indecent."

A certain Mr. Segal, trading as Stravon books which advertises in but does not produce comics, led the committee through a frightening labyrinth of detail about the rental and exchange of addresses secured through comic book coupons. Much of the material, if not pornographic, is of the "How to Draw" and "What Every Boy and Girl Should Know" types. The Stravon system for keeping adult material out of juvenile hands was more subtle than the committee was able to grasp. Mr. Segal at one point admitted to a regrettable slip of over a year ago when "by mistake" a tray of 800 juvenile addresses received considerable physiological enlightenment by mail. Aroused parents wrote to Segal and to a number of other people, who wrote to the committee.

A welcome interruption to the two solid days of alternating deviousness and frustration came with the success story of Mrs. Helen Meyer of Dell Comics (Matthew Murphy, chief editor), whose line comprises 15% of all titles and 32% of total sales. Dell carries no horror, but chiefly animations and old-style funnies. They print about thirty million copies a month and sell over twenty-five million. Mrs. Meyer told the committee that it was simply untrue that it is necessary to publish crime and horror tales for financial success. Her only reservation concerning the committee's efforts, in which her editor joined her strongly, took the form of anger at the failure of people to distinguish good comics from bad in the current discussion. She feels herself a strong contributor to juvenile enjoyment and feels that very few care to acknowledge her contribution, in the excitement of the hour.

The third and final day of hearings in New York was June 4, 1954. On this oc-



casion lengthy and clear testimony was given by Assemblyman James A. Fitzpatrick of Plattsburg, N. Y. Mr. Fitzpatrick is chairman of the New York State Joint Legislative Committee to Study the Publication of Comics. His account of five years of activity in New York was dotted with references to the action of the New Jersey Bar Association in emulation of New York successes. Three pieces of legislation have been signed by Governor Dewey, of which one is a tie-in sales bill outlawing the necessity of dealers to sell any items against their wills. (Mr. Ben Freedman later in the day partially countered Mr. Fitzpatrick's report with the observation that there was not yet enforcement of the law at the street level). With a practical awareness of the triumph of delaying tactics in these matters, Mr. Fitzpatrick said that his group hopes that Postmasters General can be given five-day injunction powers against publishers of individual lurid issues. He quoted the well-considered opinion of Justice Cohn in the Winters case which makes clear the distinction between the use and abuse of the right to publish. The apparent inability of some minds to realize the weight of American legal opinion and practice against harmful materials is a serious handicap to any course of action. Censorship in the sense of a curb on publication is thought an unqualifiedly bad thing by many, a mentality which will often spell the victory of greater evils.

The remainder of the day was given to expert elucidation of the production-distribution-sales tangle. "Wheels within wheels" scarcely describes the inner workings of this billion-dollar industry safely lodged in ten or a dozen hands. Can the sketchers and copy men be reached and made to desist? The lithographic and printing trades through their unions? Will increasing dealer strength succeed in resolving the issue? Or is sole hope to reside in the courts? An aroused national conscience is testified to by multiplied communications to the committee from all over the country. It remains to be seen if the sincerely interested parties are willing to pay the high price in money,

time, and public opinion required for a workable solution to the problem.

## XI

A number of clear impressions survive this observer's reading of the testimony, which he finds it impossible in practice to separate from mental positions long held. He begs leave to set down the combined product:

1. The senatorial members of the subcommittee and their counsel are extremely capable persons. Legal acumen and good sense are found joined in all of them, with the palm perhaps to Mr. Beaser. What at first seemed a display of learned lore in Senator Hennings, the writer later took for needed thrusts in the direction of legal refinement. Police and court action against pictorial and printed rot is always going to have trouble with a bench proud of its knowledge that there is naughtiness in Chaucer and Boccaccio, and that these are classics.

2. A higher value must be set on the instincts of an experienced humanity. The testimony of experts is valid only on the terms of their research, which terms are invariably much restricted. If every parent needed "a study" to justify his action, parenthood would be reduced to immobility.

3. Once it is conceded that a perfect unanimity among psychologists is required for action, any solution is put off to Greek kalends. Also, a stiffer requirement for action is imposed than in any other field of human dealing.

4. There must be a determination to act against all harmful media with an equal diligence. The fact that there is no single agency of evil which has a clear title to existence, regardless of how others may be dealt with, is incomprehensible to avaricious minds, and they will base their case on "discrimination." Not a few jurists seem likewise unprepared for the principle.

5. Moral convictions must have their match in a realism about contemporary commerce, and the law as currently interpreted. The zealot unaware of the difficulties of the past in securing convictions



against the industry should be assigned to further study.

6. American confusion over what liberty of the press allows must halt somewhere, or we are undone. Unless a nation retains its moral starch, it shortly will not care about holding fast to civil or political freedoms.

7. The issues are so drawn that the ab-

stention of "good publishers" from industry-wide organization takes on the same aspect of moral fault as a company's abstention from unionism, claiming the absence of need. Freedom from abuses ceases to be the sole issue. The need of the community prevails and it has a clear claim on participant strength.

### **\$1500 ASSOCIATION PRESS LEADERSHIP BOOK AWARD**

Association Press will pay \$1500 to the writer of the most useful book-length manuscript dealing with any aspects of service by professionals or laymen in these areas:

- ★ religious education
- ★ community organization
- ★ recreation
- ★ social work
- ★ group work
- ★ human relations

The \$1500 award includes: \$500 outright, exclusive of royalty; \$1000 royalty advance; plus royalty contract. Manuscripts should total 150 or more typed pages. DEADLINE: June 1, 1955. Send for manuscript preparation instructions.

### **ASSOCIATION PRESS**

291 Broadway, New York 7, N. Y.

## VII

# HOW CANADA HAS DEALT WITH The Comic Book SITUATION THROUGH LEGISLATION

E. D. FULTON

*Member of Canadian Parliament, Kamloops, B. C.*

IN CANADA the comic book situation, and particularly the crime comic type of publication, is a relatively new development which reached mass circulation proportions only since the end of the 1939-45 war. The rapidity of its growth and the enormous increase in the circulation of this type of pulp magazine was such that it was several years before the public became aroused to an awareness of what was going on.

In this country we have had in our Criminal Code for upwards of seventy years a provision making it a criminal offence to print, publish, circulate etc., obscene or filthy objects, including literature. There was however no specific definition of what was intended by the word "obscene" and it has been left to the Courts to interpret the word and to lay down through our system of precedent the types of offensive article which would be punished as being a breach of the Code. It will readily be seen that, both because of the meaning of the word itself and because of the fact that the Crime comic was a phenomenon of recent growth, the decided cases and even the Statute itself were of little help in preventing or punishing the circulation of the crime comic type of literature as it first appeared. Incidentally it should be pointed out that under our constitution, the Criminal Law is of general application all across Canada, and only the Federal Parliament can enact criminal legislation; enforcement of the Criminal Law however, is a matter which comes under the Provincial authorities. Any action to deal with the comic book situation in the sense of making their publication a criminal offence could therefore only be taken by the Federal Parliament.

As is usual in these cases, it was religious and educational groups, service clubs and

others comprising within their membership large numbers of decent minded citizens who are concerned with the moral standards of their children and of society generally, and who first realized just what was going on, and became aware of the threat to the welfare of society constituted by the comic book industry. After a series of crimes committed in this and other countries which followed closely the patterns illustrated in the comic books,—so closely that their commission by children of tender years could not be called mere coincidence—various of these organizations decided to spearhead a drive calling for effective legislative action. In this connection too much credit cannot be given to Parent-Teacher and related organizations, service clubs and religious and educational organizations generally.

There were however two courses open: the one being direct censorship or suppression of this type of publication, the other being the enactment of a provision in the Criminal Code which would make it an offense to publish a comic which would be defined in the Code so that all would know exactly what the legislation intended. It has always been my view that anything suggestive of censorship should be strenuously avoided, and I felt that, even although the dangers from crime comics were enormous, to attempt to cure it by establishing any form of censorship would be possibly to introduce an evil even greater than that which was sought to be cured.

Accordingly, in all the discussions and preliminary talks I had in connection with the matter, I urged that the proper approach was that, if the legislature, which was responsible to the people, was of the opinion after mature consideration that the crime comic industry constituted a threat to the welfare and

morals of society, then the legislature was entitled to enact a provision which would make the publication of crime comics a criminal offence. This would have the effect that Parliament would be exercising its proper function of codifying, insofar as that can be done, the moral standards which reflected the position of society as a whole; and just as it is the decision of society that murder or robbery are threats to the corporate existence of an orderly society, which cannot be permitted and which therefore constitute a crime, so Parliament might enact that the publication of a crime comic, which taught the commission of Crime, was similarly an offence against the welfare of society as a whole. However by enacting this provision in the Criminal Code no one was taking to himself the powers of censorship and saying to this or that individual what might or might not be published; rather Parliament defined what is meant by crime comics, and then stated that their printing, publication, sale or distribution was an offence punishable by the ordinary legal process and that it would be up to our Courts, which are constituted for that purpose, to decide whether in any particular case the offence had been committed.

After considerable discussion both in the House of Commons and outside, I introduced in the Fall of 1949 a private bill to amend Section 207 of the Criminal Code of Canada to make the publication etc., of a crime comic an offence punishable in our Criminal Courts. The situation had by this time become so grave that this bill passed unanimously in the House of Commons, and with only four dissenting votes in the Senate of Canada. It was actually slightly amended at the request of the government, after consultation with the law enforcement officers in the provinces, to make it of more general application and more easily enforceable. It has always been my impression that Parliament welcomed such a measure feeling that this was the proper approach to the problem and that, if vigorously enforced, it would be effective and would in addition relieve the pressure that was coming from certain sources to set up a Board of Censors to furnish an answer to the problem.

This legislation, with minor amendments,

is in force today and will form Section 150 of the Revised Criminal Code of Canada which goes into effect on the 1st of January next. The operative words of the Section are as follows: "Everyone commits an offence who . . . makes, prints, publishes, or distributes, sells or has in his possession for the purpose of publication, distribution or circulation, a crime comic." A crime comic is defined as "a magazine, periodical or book that exclusively or substantially comprises matter depicting pictorially:

- a) The commission of crimes, real or fictitious, or
- b) Events connected with the commission of crimes, real or fictitious, whether occurring before or after the commission of the crime."

The definition has been slightly modified to cover the case of the "horror comic" or story of fantasy where all the characters are fantastic creatures who could have no real existence on earth but are forms of superman etc., but whose crimes as illustrated are even more ghastly and even more fascinating to children than the original form which was confined to the illustration of crimes committed by ordinary human beings.

It is not suggested for a moment that the mere enactment of this legislation is the whole answer to the problem, although it has proved of great assistance in dealing with the threat of the crime comic. However no legislation can work unless it is vigorously enforced and there is still the greatest need in this country of committees of interested citizens who will keep close check on the news stands in their communities and where they find offensive material, demand the immediate and vigorous enforcement of the provisions of our Code.

Another modification which I consider would be desirable would be to greatly increase the penalties for those who print and publish this offensive matter. These seem to me to be those chiefly responsible for the threat to the morals of our youth, although no one who takes part in the chain of distribution can be entirely absolved from responsibility. So enormously profitable has this

industry become however that it does seem that only severe penalties will discourage those who are prepared to make a profit out of the demoralization of our children. The real profit accrues to the printers and publishers and I therefore feel that increased penalties in their cases would be justified. So far however the government and Parliament have not accepted this view.

The great majority although not all of the comic books circulating in Canada are imported from the United States. It was my privilege earlier this year to appear before a

special committee of your Senate which was investigating the problem of the comic book industry and its relation to juvenile delinquency. I should like to repeat here what I suggested to them: that while we do not for a moment take the position that our solution is perfect or the only answer, we do think it affords a workable solution and it would be of the greatest assistance to us in Canada if some similar vigorous measures could be taken in the United States to choke this threat at its source.

---

The May issue of the *International Journal of Religious Education* was a special number, "Design for Teaching." It was a very practical and helpful interpretation of "How the Best Teachers Go about Their Work." Most of the writers were laymen and women who have had success in teaching in church schools. Its usefulness is indicated in the number of extra copies sold. The original printing of 20,000 extra copies was sold within two weeks. A reprint of 20,000 more, in permanent form, was sold within a few weeks, and a second reprinting of 25,000 copies is more than half sold. About 90,000 copies are now in circulation.

This reprint is useful in training schools and workshops, in coaching individual teachers, in showing prospective teachers how to teach, in teachers' and parents' meetings as a basis of discussion, and for individual study. The magazine is illustrated throughout with drawings by John R. Steiger.

Copies of the reprint are available from the Department of Publication and Distribution, National Council of Churches, 79 E. Adams Street, Chicago 3, Illinois, 30c for 1 to 9 copies; 25c for 10 to 19 copies, and 20c each for 20 or more copies.

. . . . .

Membership will bring the Journal, RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, to a friend for a year and keep him in contact with the frontiers of thought and experimentation in religious education and related fields. Membership will also provide fellowships in a local chapter of the R.E.A. if your friend lives in one of the many large cities which have chapters.

To provide a gift of membership in the R.E.A., fill in the blank below and send with check for \$5.00 to the New York office of the R.E.A. If received in sufficient time, the office will send notice of the gift, along with the Nov-Dec. 1954 Journal, so as to reach your friend before Christmas.

Religious Education Association, 545 West 111th St., New York 25, N. Y.

I enclose \_\_\_\_\_ for a Christmas gift membership in the R.E.A.

FOR (Print name and address of recipient)

FROM (Print name and address of sender)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street and Number \_\_\_\_\_

Street and Number \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zone \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zone \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

## VIII

### THE COMIC BOOKS! MOST INSIDIOUS POISON—MATERIALISM

HAROLD C. GARDINER, S.J.

*Literary Editor, the National Catholic Review of the Week, "America," New York City*

THE MOST serious indictment that has been, with great justification, leveled at the crime-and-horror type of comic book has been that they pander to moral degeneracy. This was the sad and alarming burden of Dr. Fredric Wertham's most revealing *Seduction of the Innocent* (Rinehart, 1953), a book which, by revealing in detail the true nature of these comic books, has done much to alert public opinion and law-enforcement agencies to the undoubted connection between this kind of reading and some juvenile delinquency.

Dr. Wertham was also, and every bit as convincingly, concerned with the cultural ill effects of the comic books, but it is to be feared, I believe, that many parents and religious leaders will be so deeply disturbed over the more lurid aspects of the comic books that they will rather pass over a more subtle danger lurking within their garish covers, and will fail to see that there is a connection between the moral degeneracy the books stimulate and the cultural stagnation they encourage.

Page after page of *Seduction of the Innocent* unrolls before our incredulous and horrified gaze examples of rape, sadism, masochism, bestiality, bloody cruelty, contempt for law, for honesty, for womanhood, which constitute normal reading for hundreds of thousands of young Americans,—the hope, we are piously told, of the future of our country. Here, for example, are but a few of Dr. Wertham's summarizing statements about the more flagrant bad moral effects of the comic books: "up to the beginning of the comic-book era there were hardly any serious crimes such as murder by children under twelve" (p. 155); "the contempt for law and police and the brutality of punishment in the comic books is subconsciously translated by children into con-

flict with authority, and they develop a special indifference to it" (p. 158); "in no other literature for children has the image of womanhood been so degraded" (p. 234); "the real message of the comic books to children is the equation: physical force equals good" (p. 235).

This is all quite true, but the very sensationalism of the charges, well-founded though it is, may be so dazzling that it blinds us to what I feel is an even greater danger. This danger is to be found not only in the crime-and-horror comic books, but in almost all the mass media that make an appeal to the adolescent mind. I shall try, however, to restrict my thought to the specific medium of the comic books.

What is the danger, all the more insidious because of its apparent innocence? It is the danger that the young mind is becoming steeped in an atmosphere of utter materialism. Underneath all the sex, crime and brutality of the comics runs the constant motif: the only thing you have to worry about is how to get along—and that means get ahead—in this world. Why are cops to be despised and "rubbed out" when one can do it and get away with it? Because they interfere with getting rich. Why are the "dames" to be slapped around, used and discarded like mere chattel? Because they can help, or hinder the material prosperity of the gangster or the mob.

If materialism does not present itself under the guise of material wealth, then it will under the mask of power. "Superman" and "Superwoman" do not get wealthy, precisely, by their fantastic adventures, but they certainly gather to themselves all the power that we used to think was the exclusive ambition of the totalitarian demagogues. But whether it be wealth or power, or a most alluring combination of the two, the be-all



and end-all of existence that is held before the gaze of thousands of young Americans is a worldly, "earthy, of the earth" living in the here and now, with no thought of values that may and do transcend the here and now.

This appeal to the young mind is by no means confined to the horror-and-crime comic book. It subtly permeates many of the "good" comic books as well, as when the only ideal that is held up to the youngsters is the lovely suburban home with at least one car, at most two children and—it is to be hoped—at most one wife. This same atmosphere is, of course, what makes the movies so frequently an insidious force in moulding young ideals. There is, I would suppose, very little nudity in our films, or other more obvious violations of the Motion Picture Code (the furore over "the French Line" would seem to show that its very rarity was what focussed attention on it), but there are dozens of films, labeled "unobjectionable," which inculcate day in and day out that all that is needed to fulfill the cravings of the human soul are the good things of this world.

It is not to be expected, needless to say, that the comic books should take the place of the home and the church; it is not their job to preach the higher values of religion. But neither is it their job subtly and incessantly to deny, at least by implication, that there are higher values.

I stated above that this materialistic atmosphere, especially of the comic books, is, in my view, even more of a danger than the open violence and brutality. What grounds do I have for that judgment? Well, since the era of the comic books, though juvenile crime has swollen monstrously, thousands of young readers of such books have grown out of them, have graduated into respectable adults and mothers and fathers. Not every child who steeped himself for hours a day in the horror comics remained hypnotized by that subhuman world. As maturity developed, the youngster himself came to see the utter bad taste, to say the least, of this kind of reading matter, and so, he grew away from it, if, unfortunately, some of his young friends never did.

But the young mind that recognizes at last the crudity and, really, the stupidity of the crime-and-horror aspects of the comic books is not perceptive enough to realize the materialism those books rest upon. And so the youngster grows into young adulthood, into marriage and the raising of a family, and his youngsters in turn find themselves touched with the virus of the same materialism with which the mass media of communications—among them the comic books—had infected his parents.

*Had* infected his parents? Perhaps I ought to say: is still infecting his parents. For the publishers of the comic books astonish us when they tell us that a good proportion of their wares are avidly read by adults. So the circle goes round and round: today's children are steeped in a miasma of materialism; tomorrow's parents—unless home or church or the unaided grace of God step in to correct their views—will be materialistically minded—and *their* children will be mired deeper still. The circle is vicious, and as far as the comic books help to keep it turning on itself, they too are vicious, and more vicious in this than in their sadism and brutality.

The cultural stagnation which the comic books foster has its layer of materialism, too, to wrap around the young and adolescent mind. Defenders of the comic books tell us that, after all, they are not much different from the Nick Carter, wild west, travel-to-the-moon stories of your and my youth. If we discount the horror and sexiness and cruelty of many of the modern comic books, there is a semblance of truth in this defense. But there is also a most important falsehood, and this is where the comics—even the better ones, so often help to ingrain the materialistic attitude.

For there is an intimate connection between the imagination and an awareness of spiritual values. I do not mean that one has to have the imaginative sensitivity of a great poet in order to realize such truths as God, eternity, moral right and wrong. In fact, the imagination can often get in the way and block up the road of right reason. But if only the imaginative genius could

grasp the truth of the Gospels, for example, Our divine Lord would not have issued a very realistic and efficient order when He told His Apostles to "go and teach all nations."

The imagination is a wonderfully delicate and apt instrument to help one realize—make real for himself—the eternal truths. If the imagination is blunted and dulled, these truths may still be held with utter constancy and sincerity, but they may not be held with the vividness, the immediacy, the sense of personal possession which they should evoke. It is not, after all, a coincidence that some of the great mystics (St. John of the Cross for one) and many of the saints (St. Thomas Aquinas comes to mind), were also great poets.

Here is where the comics throw a roadblock in the path of sensitiveness to spiritual values. For the comics, again even the best of them, stunt the imagination. When we read Jules Verne, we read. There may have been a few illustrations, but we went to the books for the story, not for the cartoons. And when we popped our eyes over the one more redskin who had but recently bitten the dust, they popped because we spelled out the fight and the courage and the danger word by word, in a state of wonderful suspense, instead of seeing it all in one four-color drawing.

In other words, in the penny-dreadfuls of an earlier age—though I am not defending them as great literature for the young—our imagination was working; we were visualizing the scene, painting the characters, as we read. One side of our personality, one faculty of our mind, was developing its muscles, and when mother or teacher put into our hands a *Wind in the Willows* or a *Treasure Island*, we may have cast fond backward glances on Nick and his pals, but we were at least equipped with an imagination that was not too flabby to try to shake hands with new friends.

That this paralysis of the imagination is one of the bad effects of the comic books is well demonstrated by Dr. Wertham in

*Seduction of the Innocent*. On pp. 142-143, for example, we run across such statements as: "I have yet to see a child who was influenced to read 'classics' or 'famous authors' in the original by reading them in comic-book versions. What happens instead is that the comic-book version cuts the children off from this source of pleasure, entertainment and education"; "Many parents and educators [quoting a public librarian] have expressed to me their agreement with us on the stand that such reading of comic books has a pernicious effect on the reading habits of children."

The announcement on September 16, that 24 of the 27 comic-book publishers in the United States, responsible for 75 per cent of the books published, had adopted a code of ethics to be under the unhampered administration of an esteemed ex-member of the municipal bench, was heartening news. Publishers have been alarmed and at long last seem determined to get rid of the crime-and-horror type of comic book. We shall have to wait for results. If the worst elements of this type of comic book are actually removed from the scene, a great gain will have been made.

But even so, let us not fool ourselves into thinking that that will solve the entire problem of the comic books. The danger still remains—the danger that an utterly materialistic view of life will still be inculcated day in and day out by the love-and-romance, the adventure, the thrilling-story, the western comic, and that this materialism will be helped along in its debilitating work by the lack of imaginative development the comics, by their nature, promote.

The remedy? The home and the church and the school, of course. But, in its place and role, the introduction of the child, at as early an age as possible, to imaginative literature that has at least the suggestion of a spiritual content. This is the task for home-builders and educators. It is not too hard a task, and the richness of its rewards will make it a joy and a glory.

## IX

### THE ADVENT SEASON AND THE MASS MEDIA

KENNETH UNDERWOOD<sup>1</sup>

*Associate Professor of Christian Ethics and the Policy Sciences in the Public Affairs Faculty at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut*

IF YOU ARE an avid reader of the trade journals of the advertising industry you will note that about this time of year the advertisers are trying to understand a strange change of pace that occurs annually in American buying patterns. *Tide*, *Printer's Ink*, etc., are confronted by a mass buying splurge that somehow seems to have its basic motivation in a reality not created by the advertising man's manipulation of the mass media. It is true, of course, that the advertisers' professional journals take abundant credit for guiding the demand toward their clients' products, but their editors are occasionally bothered a bit by the fact that their popular media (*Tide* in the last Advent season termed them, "The greatest aggregate means and creative power for mass education and persuasion the world has ever known") cannot create another season of the year able to bring about the purchase of gifts the way Christmas does. Though God knows the advertisers keep trying.

The objective indices of sales, correlated with "seasonal" symbol manipulation, are witness that something is at work which transcends the advertising man's world. And writers in the advertisers' trade journals acknowledge this as a mystery to which the name Christ is not given. Is not the advertising man's situation symbolic of a culture in which millions live through a season which is not possible without a Christ, a season in which men's lives are quickened in anticipation, but in which the commercial and advertising leaders cannot and do not consciously acknowledge the source of the new concept of time which is abroad in the land?

This observation about advertisers' trade journals, about Advent and the meaning of time is made as an introduction to a theme

I should like to pursue in this article. I want to look back briefly over the past two or three Advent seasons and examine the meaning of the season to various specific groups which are a part of the general mass communications industry. And I want to ask concurrently with this inquiry what this season means to some Christian groups and communities within our culture. Actually it will probably be more accurate if I say I seek to articulate my own understanding of a theology of Advent against the back-drop of some of the competing theologies of our mass media culture.

#### I. *The Meaning of Time for the Ad Man and for the Christian in the Advent Season.*

To return to the advertising man and the Advent season—or more precisely, to return to *Tide*, the major publication of the advertising profession and to the motifs this publication wishes to see developed in great blocks of space in the popular press—the meaning of Advent focuses for him in the *conception of time* which emerges from the season.

*Tide* is aware each Advent season that anticipation of something new becomes widespread in our culture. And with this anticipation occurs the greatest selling and buying period of the year. There seems to be a motivation to spend money, to abandon cautious consumption, to indulge luxury tastes, to buy gifts for others, that explodes within man just about the Monday after the first Sunday of Advent. And with this explosion there is developed a new sales talk in the trade journals. Up to now the ads have, as *Tide* once observed, been used to talk about what old Sam Adams said every man was interested in—"his girl and his dinner." But with Advent, the sales talk shifts to that of good deeds through the purchase of gifts for

<sup>1</sup>This article is based on a series of Chapel talks delivered at Yale University Divinity School when the author was a member of its faculty.

one's girl, for Uncle Ed, for a whole list of consumers on a one year "I—Thou" relationship. A celestial language is introduced into the advertisements ("angel-like," "heavenly," "ethereal") for lingerie, books, and cars.

There is another aspect to the concept of time in the Advent season of the advertiser's world, and that is the heightened sense of importance of the present, the intensity with which "now" is lived. This season, to use a theologian's phrase, has its *kairos*, its special moments of time for the fulfillment of something important; or, to use the advertising man's phrase, this season is the period of "full exploitation."

There is a final aspect to the advertiser's approach to the Advent season which I discern in such voices of the industry as *Tide*. I have said that these men sense during the season some break in the continuity of copy and in the response to it by nature of the season's anticipation of the future, and they sense a new importance has been given daily shopping. But there is also a strong feeling that the past is present in these crucial shopping days before Christmas. The "pay-off" of the Christmas ads is possible only because of decisions of the advertisers made throughout the year to develop certain reflexes and associations. Christmas is the real test of what the advertisers have done during the rest of the year. The advertising man may be loved momentarily for his good deeds in this season—such as the Advertising Council's advertisements for school teachers ("Merry Christmas, Miss Miller") and for T.B. stamp drives—*Tide* reminds the advertising men. But let us not forget that "we are never going to be anymore loved than an insurance salesman. So let us quit worrying about trying to be loved and . . . get to work using the power we have to promote business, and sell goods essential to society, to create an atmosphere in which business can hope and plan and dream again." Time is seen by the advertising men as a social process linking past and future in a continuum of influence and consequence. The ad men and tooth film never let up.

There has been a strong tendency in Christian writing, like that of the advertising men,

to see time not simply as a series of existential moments, autonomous and discreet in themselves, but as a series of moments entering into and qualifying the continuous stream of life in and through which God works. It is true, Christ says according to John, that "one sows and another reaps." Thus, the response of our culture, of the advertising men and of the rest of the journalistic profession to the Advent season stands as a terrifying revelation of the cumulative activity of the Church in its witness to the Gospel, and all that it has neglected in its witness during the year. There is perhaps no greater opportunity for the churches to understand themselves and their involvement in modern culture than this season. The theologies of the ad men compete now with the churches in providing the series of myths and symbols which serve as a network of meaning and interpretation of the event called Christmas. And often the Advent of the advertising men is not something the churches fight, but the Advent which the churches also celebrate.

The advertiser's dream of how to usher in the Christmas season is perhaps best symbolized in the Macy parade. I watched on television the climax of this parade one Thanksgiving Day (1952, I believe) as did millions of others. Santa arrived and was ushered to the microphones on the reviewing stand in order to make his speech. He evidenced terror as he found the first microphone dead. Moving to another and clutching firmly a script written by a Macy advertiser, Santa called attention to all the fine window displays in Macy's, peered long at words which turned out to be an exclamation "My goodness," and ended by telling children to look forward to the presents which he was going to bring them. Ought not we be deeply saddened by this revealing and final scene of an Advent-time parade? Ought not we be saddened by a culture whose advertising leadership produces a fumbling, copy-book Santa as the climactic introduction to the Christmas season? Ought not we be saddened by a Church whose isolation from the central forces which mold the symbols and myths of our culture helped make this scene possible?



II. *The Meaning of Community for the Christian and for Some Toy Manufacturers in the Advent Season.*

The motifs interpreting the Advent season to millions of people in the popular press can be examined not only through the trade journals of one group of mass communicators, but also by intensive examination of one piece of literature produced for a client.

Let us examine the ads produced during a recent Advent season for one manufacturing association whose products are essential to our culture's understanding of and celebration of this season. This is the toymakers'. Its members' products are a part of almost every living room on Christmas morning.

The American Toy Institute is the trade association of toy manufacturers in this country. From it there has flown in past seasons a body of literature and ads whose theme is "This Christmas invest in your child's future—give *American* toys." This is a theme of the association's "house-organ," of its literature for distribution, and of a series of multi-page advertisements appearing in such mass circulation magazines as *Life*.

The main argument for American toys in past Advent season material has been as follows: American toys are superior to foreign or non-American toys for three reasons. 1) They are first of all more "scientifically planned" than foreign toys. They are tested by research to fit children's needs, to discover attitudes, and to prepare careers." 2) American toys are made from "the highest quality materials available because Americans have the most materials to choose from." 3) American toys are "cleaner, more sanitary" than foreign toys. So, "When you shop for your children this Christmas season, ask for American toys." This is "the sure way to make Christmas yield lasting joy."

This campaign epitomizes nicely some of the major motifs in the press of American trade and business associations as to the basic superior ingredients of the American way of life. Indeed, the American Toy Institute advertisements claim that American toys are "a product of the American way of life" and that they make "an essential contribution" to

that way of life. Hence, buy American. What is this American way? Superior, scientific development, greater material abundance, and the best sanitation. Here are, I judge from limited knowledge, three of the major cults of the advertising world. And all, we are assured, give promise for the future of our children and indeed have an eternal quality about them.

The exaltation of these virtues as the basis of exclusion of the products of foreign peoples from America could not help but make more difficult the acceptance of the burdens which accrue from this policy of exclusiveness. For these are the very virtues of American culture which ironically have often become in our worship of them the vices which have isolated us from the rest of the world and from understanding the needs of other peoples. In our country the liberal dream of freedom over history by the gradual extension of scientific method and the predominance of the instrumentalist view of reason as a tool simply for manipulation and problem-solving has made us blind to the sources of motivation in men and the fullness of man's nature. Scientific mind can contribute the important factual information that most of our free world allies—such as Japan, whose toys American Toy Institute has sought to exclude from competition with them in the Advent season—cannot even feed themselves. They live or die by their trade. The social sciences can show us that the pattern of this trade, once stable and expanding, is now chaotic and contracting, its rules becoming more restrictive each year. They can show us that the United States is the only free country with the resources to set the climate of trade for other nations, and that such strength is still poorly used.

But this science cannot provide man with the will to act upon these facts. It cannot plumb the depths of reality in which man's reason is rooted. It cannot express the stirrings of human affections, the search of men for community with other men, the grace of God working in the world. Yet the whole of man's being, in the religious dimensions of his existence man either accepts or rejects the Advent admonitions of the American Toy



Institute for world relations. The Christian in facing such a decision, turns, as Paul asked the Christians of Corinth to turn, to "the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ," to inform the earnestness and test the genuineness of our love. "You will know," says Paul, "that though Christ was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich."

The second virtue of the American way of life which is also in American toys, we have been told in Advent ads, is the greater material abundance of our nation. The basic problem of our relations to our allies is surely this: how make morally acceptable to them, how justify this very fact? For behind it lie life and death for many people.

By 1939, the average American life expectancy was almost twice that of the person in twenty-eight underdeveloped countries studied by a careful research group and believed to be somewhat representative of conditions for approximately two-thirds of the world's population. American food consumption in the same year was about forty percent higher than that of the average in the underdeveloped countries studied. In our country seven percent of the world's population produces and consumes almost forty percent of the world's goods. From 1945 to 1952, the American people through their government have poured over thirty-five billion dollars in loans and gifts to their allies; it is money which has kept the free world afloat and let us not minimize this fact.

But the great weakness of this giving is that it has, like most gift-giving of the wealthy, been more informed by philanthropy, than by justice. It has had much of the quality of Christmas-time sentimentality about it in its escape from hard and calculated negotiations necessary to express the love of men in a complex world—a love that seeks a continued relationship in a community and seeks to secure the grounds of mutual respect and strength. Or in economic terms, a love which seeks the creation of the conditions of a genuine new world market. The admonitions of Paul about giving to those in need are helpful here. Let us

use what we have to complete the task of building up the resources of the needy, suggests Paul, so that those who are now impoverished may be able to contribute to the abundance of all. And let us carry out a program which does not ease the burden for some, and overburden others.

The particularly infuriating thing about the American toy manufacturer's bid for our Advent attention is that it strengthens, in the name of our children's future, the policy of economic nationalism. Given freer access to the huge American market, Europe would probably earn most of the dollars of which it is ironically short. But it is easier for us to donate the dollars, to congratulate ourselves on our charity, than to face the thorny problems of greatly expanding our imports. And it is easier for us as religious education leaders to glow in the philanthropy of our nation toward others, than to help our laymen face in our Sunday schools and in our church discussions their specific political and economic responsibilities in expanding our nation's imports.

The third virtue of American toys, their comparative hygienic qualities, is intended as the clincher. Always in our culture when all other appeals fail in the differentiation of products and services, the moral fervor of the cult of cleanliness, now present after years of detergent, soap, and cosmetic advertisements, is called into action. There is an intimate relationship between this cult and that of science, of "know-how," and of material success. The small suburban family unit, supplied by appliances of modern science which keep the housewife "dainty, fresh, and lovable," and children happily at play with perfumed toys produced in a culture with the world's best plumbing becomes the realization of the Christmas dream, the central cultus of the American way of life. To make the point of this article again: there are crucial and basic conflicts going on now between men and their interpretations of the meaning and purpose of this season. No less is at stake than the requirements of community for all people in the world. To interpret these conflicts in sermons, in the church press, in the mass media, in worship from the perspective of our

faith is our responsibility. To guide our laymen in disciplined study of ecumenical documents, which, for the most part, seek not to offer commands but serious advice, is our privilege. To transform the sentimentalized acts of charity inspired by this season into a sustained and studied relation to peoples outside our land is our ministry. To make the purchase of a toy an act of worship of the God revealed in Christ and not of a well-scrubbed deity or a voice of the laboratory is our calling in this season of seasons.

### III. *The Meaning of Communication for Movie Exhibitors and the Christian in the Advent Season.*

Let us look now at another group of people in the mass communication industry and see if we may gain some new perspective on the relation of the Church to culture and on the perversion of our understanding of our Gospel. For some years I have been studying the articles, columns, advertisements, and movie reviews directed at the Christmas holiday trade, as it is called, in such trade journals as *Billboard*, the "Pulse of the Movie Industry," *The Showman's Trade Review*; *Variety*; and *The Motion Picture Herald*.

One of the disturbing facts which emerge in examination of these journals and their preparation of the movie exhibitors for the holiday season is that Christmas is universally accepted in the trade as a time of year when *entertainment* films are what everybody wants, and when this aspect of the industry really comes into its own. The Christmas holiday season is seen as a sort of national binge, and the companies vie in offering to the exhibitors movies which they hold are their best examples of the entertainer's product. The "off-beat" or unusual pictures are taboo, and the musicals and comedies with big name stars making love on lavish sets are the order of the day.

Let us examine, for example, the buildup of films in the Advent period, 1952—a time when some Yale Divinity School students made a fairly accurate study of film industry promotion. One of the four page advertisements which turned up in the study of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer activities appeared in the

*Showman's Trade Review*. It indicated that "Meet Captain Kidd" was the M.G.M. film which would be seen most during the Christmas time. The *Showman's Trade Review*, in appraising this film for exhibitors looking for a holiday special, said of it: "The film is not to be convincing, merely entertaining. The direction sets a fairly fast pace so that the audience will not stop to analyze the story or the characters while they are watching it. . . . The picture should outsell any of the more recent Abbott and Costello films."

Now it is crucial that we understand what this correlation of the Christmas season with the highest fulfillment of the film industry function as an entertainment medium means for the Christian church.

One of the excellent theses of Van Harvey (who writes elsewhere in this issue) is that many of the fundamental conflicts which penetrate all aspects of the film industry can be understood as conflicts between groups with a basic orientation either toward the entertainer concept of communication, or toward the artist concept. The entertainers believe that movies are basically for the purpose of bringing pleasure and profit. Movies are a business and they thrive on giving the largest number of people what they want. The mass audience wants to be entertained, to escape from a confused and complicated world. On the other hand, the artists argue that movies are an art form. The vitality and the future of the film industry lie in the development of pictures which portray human life truthfully and honestly, that seek to represent man sensitively and authentically. Such pictures will express the bitter and the sweet, the tragedy and the ambiguity of life, as well as its happiness and beauty. The primary concern of the writer, the star, the producer is to communicate the truth about life, about man as he sees him, and not to produce a product calculated to arouse a paying response in the American public.

The basic distinction to be made here between the entertainer and the artist is this: the artist seeks to convey in his own terms the reality he sees. The entertainer calculates the emotions he wishes to arouse in an audience—joy, pity, terror, so forth—and he adopts

the technical means to obtain this end. The artist does not have a clear idea of what he wants to do to people or to make them do. He does want, of course, to arouse deep emotion, but his center of attention is not the emotions to be aroused, but the bringing into existence or expression a reality which he apprehends. The entertainer has clearly in mind certain responses of the audience which mean box office receipts and which will not threaten the accepted patterns of the industry, and he works for those responses.

This contrast between the entertainer concept of movies and the artist concept is illuminated by discussions in the exhibitors' trade of a film which Twentieth Century Fox selected to build up in 1952 as a major Christmas season attraction. This was "Stars and Stripes Forever." This film, Twentieth Century Fox's "Campaign Book" says, was a musical tribute to John Phillip Sousa. The *Showman's Trade Review* made clear that this was a terrific film for family attendance during the holidays. It was an "eye and ear filling show on a grand scale." The magazine—and this is most illuminating—allayed possible exhibitor's fears about one element of sadness in the film. "While a 'war angle' intervenes at the end," says the trade journal article, "and a youth returns from the Spanish American war as an amputee, this note should not bring reaction generally as 'sad,' as there is a triumphant finale with the band playing 'Semper Fidelis' as few people have heard it played and fewer even have seen such a spectacular array of bandmen in resplendent uniforms. . . ." This is the entertainer making sure that nobody cries at Christmas and thus reduce interest of a holiday crowd in a film.

One of the most disturbing things about the "Campaign Book" of "Stars and Stripes Forever" and its general promotion is the uncritical use of symbols that enhance the present values and stereotypes of our society—Sousa's fervent patriotism, his love of wife and mother, his ecstatic direction of religious music, so forth. This is seen also in the pains taken by the industry to make clear that the picture is in the "standard and great musical tradition." As a lead article in the "Campaign Book" indicates, this is a lavish musical. Its

only difference in style from the customary musical production "is its great marching numbers." Entertainment is, as epitomized in this particular film's exploitation, the opposite of a realism which portrays difficulties and deep-seated tensions in American attitudes toward our nation, its wars, its regional cultures. The picture has not emerged as the artist believes a picture should from sensitivity to standards and values that transcend the wants of a steady movie patronage. The entertainers of the industry look to the gimmick variations on a sure formula, proved by past box-office returns. On the other hand, the artist struggles to create what is always in some sense an independent center of experience. The resulting communication always pictures the world from a perspective which is not quite our perspective and therefore, calls from us an act of empathy and imagination.

There were points within the Advent literature of the industry examined in this study where one could discern the muted protests of the artists in the movies. For example, in the film "The Bad and the Beautiful," a film significantly not pressured by the industry as a film for the Christmas season, Vincent E. Minnelli and John Houseman apparently attempted to express some critical understanding of Hollywood. They tried to do this through the story of exploitation by a producer of his loves, his friends, and his work associates. But the subject matter of the film was almost entirely hid from the exhibitors in the concentration of advertisements and reviews upon the "fire" and "passion" in the romantic love motif. The vague title was deliberate, as *Box-Office* made clear in a December issue review. It pointed out that the title could be made a selling point "by plays on words with double meanings."

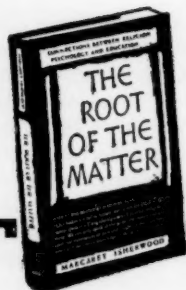
The emphasis by the film trade journals on the Christmas season as a bonanza period for the entertainer, and the greater than usual subordination of recognition of the artist's value reference, is perhaps the most bitter fact to be faced by religious educators in our entire sampling of the Advent theologies in our mass culture. The artist-entertainer controversy is one which, it seems to me, is closer to

the internal life of the church than any other of the controversies examined.

Every time a minister or religious educator prepares a sermon, organizes a church panel, speaks to a community tension, he tends to act either as an entertainer calculating the probably favorable response from his church supporters, or as an artist seeking first to state the truth he discerns. The minister is confronted constantly with the problem of how to institute a church which goes beyond a body of men exercising their consumer choice each Sunday in attendance at his or another effective speaker's service. The minister is confronted constantly with the problems of how to make his church into a community of studying, acting, worshipping believers able to sustain with understanding a man seeking to speak the truth with his neighbor, and often unable to find the happy and lucid phrase to express a reality which transcends him.

Perhaps the hardest blow for us in the film industry's stereotype of Christmas as the *formula* season is the strong feeling among Christians that with the birth of Christ a new power is released in history, "renewing the spirit of our minds." The Advent season is awaited in our memory as the arrival of a fresh and whole incarnation of God.

If the spirit of any season should sustain the efforts of movie men to express with integrity and understanding man's struggle with his faith or to express with wonderment some ordinary reality, it should be the spirit of this season. Yet we know, within our heart, that the film industry's entertainment theology stands as judgment upon the presence of the same theology within our churches, a theology often expressed in our efforts to hold the congregation we know and to appeal to it with the formulas of past witness that we have kept the few faithful and the numerous numb. And we know, in our hearts, that the film industry's theology of Advent stands, also, in judgment upon the church's failure to respond relevantly to the work of those men in the industry who often seek, also, to aid her in witness to God's redemptive action.



How can a child learn  
a faith that will last?

## THE ROOT OF THE MATTER

By MARGARET ISHERWOOD. In this important and valuable book an educator of long experience links the latest findings of education and psychology to traditional religious beliefs.

What is more important in religious education for children: values or creeds; good feelings or correct beliefs; creative experience or the punctilious performance of rites and ceremonies? These are some of the questions the author considers in her cogent and very readable consideration of the change of approach that she considers necessary to give the child of today an appreciation of faith that will carry into adulthood.

The author was formerly Acting Dean of Women in Olivet College, Mich. She has held teaching and executive positions in other schools both in America and her native England. Her book is both a guide and a challenge to parents, teachers, clergymen and all who are responsible for the education of young children.

At your bookseller ★ \$3.00

**HARPER & BROTHERS**



# X

## Basic Issues in Communications IN THE EDUCATION OF PROTESTANT MINISTERS<sup>1</sup>

DALLAS SMYTHE

*Communications Center, University of Illinois, Urbana, Ill.*

### I

COMMUNICATIONS theory, it seems to me, properly begins with a view of the social basis of our concern with the technique of communications in modern society. In order to understand the social basis of this concern it is necessary to consider the history of these techniques and of the policies which govern them. Today the so-called mass media are major purveyors of entertainment, information, and orientation (meaning by the latter the process of interpretation of experience). Today, television alone occupies about four hours per day for perhaps two-thirds of our population, and as soon as stations are built in communities where they are planned, substantially all of the population will be spending something like that much time on TV viewing. Radio, while over-shadowed by its more glamorous rival, continues to provide service to almost the whole population in substantial amounts of time per day. Motion pictures, while also feeling the rivalry of TV, continue to provide service regularly to perhaps one-third of the population and occasionally to a much larger fraction. Newspapers and magazines are suffering no perceptible diminution of public attention at the hands of TV and maintain and even enlarge their areas of influence. And the so-called "comic books," occupying a twilight zone on the margins of community concern with juvenile delinquency, are consumed in ever-larger quantities by children and by those adults whom Charles Siepmann has discerningly described as having graduated prematurely from adolescence to the immaturity of our American adulthood. In sum, these mass media deserve the name for,

taken in the aggregate, their share of the 24-hour day lived by the American population is truly massive. Our concern is with their effects and the policies which rule these media.

How did mankind get its entertainment, information and orientation before these media came into existence? In the middle ages most of the entertainment in the form of fiction (stories, folk tales, etc.) which was available to children was what they heard from senior members of their own families. In this interpersonal communication, the story teller softened or expanded the story as it developed in response to the children's reactions of alarm or pleasure. The communication was a dynamic, two-way process. Which is to say, in the lingo of communications theory, that feedback from the audience member to the communicator was immediate, direct, and quite effective. For specialized entertainment services, adults depended on ballad singers, minstrels, jesters and groups of actors. From them they heard the folk tales, fairy tales, morality stories, and so forth, which constituted the non-clerical forms of entertainment. The pageantry of church and community ceremonies also, of course, had its entertaining aspects. News and other information was similarly transmitted through face-to-face communication in feudal Europe. Travelers, merchants, seamen, soldiers transmitted news to the general public at the market place and the inn, while special couriers brought information for the nobility and clergy. For the bulk of the population which had no formal schooling available to it, the main source of orientation was conversation — between parents and children, between children, between men at the bench or at the pump or tavern, between women at their washing. For the church-goer, for the member of the medieval guild, for the merchant,

<sup>1</sup>An address given before the Workshop for Seminary Professors sponsored by The Association of Seminary Professors in the Practical Fields in Chicago, Ill., on June 10, 1954.



and for the noble, appropriate institutional orientation was provided by religious, occupational or political organizations. As with children, so with adults, feedback was immediate and complete. The communicator could see and feel and hear the emotional response of his audience. From his standpoint this had the advantage that he could modify his communications policy—could innovate—to meet the audience's reactions. He could experiment and observe the response. From the listener-viewer's standpoint, this interplay permitted direct and even intimate controls on the communicator. His performance was subject to immediate review. His responsibility was personal, direct, and unshiftable. The personal nature of medieval communications had still another implication. The success of the communicator depended in large measure on his skill and his personality. He was an individual, not a corporation. His policy was made under his own hat, not in an air-conditioned Board room by Board members mostly unskilled in the art of communication. Under these conditions the style of delineation of the characters, the story-line, the news report and the interpretation was free and fluid. Apart from the feedback condition which marked it, medieval communication was also strongly traditionally directed. Medieval life was largely lived according to custom, which superstitious and irrational though it might be ruled in the individual's life and conditioned the content of his communications. You might say that he internalized at his parents' side the traditions which he then used to direct his life.

The introduction of the printing press, together with the Reformation, the Renaissance, and the Rise of Modern Capitalism marked the transition to a quite different state of affairs. With the printing press came books, newspapers and the predecessors of our magazines. Increasingly these media assumed the functions of providing entertainment, information and orientation, though the transition was slow. The medieval functions of the parents, the traveling entertainers, and so forth in relation to communication were attenuated slowly. However, an important

new feature entered the communications process when the printed media *began to be businesses*. To this extent communications lost their personal, face-to-face nature. Now, if the story-teller's readers threw his book into the fireplace in disgust, he didn't know it. There was no direct feedback. The readers had lost their direct control over those who spoke to them through the printing press. The market came between communicator and reader. Moreover, with the market for publications came the growth of the market for writers. Creative writers were alienated from the policy of the press. Editors began to make policy on the selection of books and information for their newspapers—in line with the business appraisal of the market. Writers became specialists in writing in contrast to the full-functioned creative story-tellers of medieval times. While direct feedback was lost in this process, indirect feedback of a sort continued. The communicator could infer some degree of public acceptance from the sales of his product, though how to interpret this evidence became an issue which continues down to today. A more effective indirect control, however, was available to readers through the possibility that new writers, or writers of new types of material could fairly easily find printers who would publish for them. Printing was relatively easy and relatively inexpensive in terms of capital requirements. I should note in passing that the typical mode of character direction also changed during this period. Increasingly the medieval tradition-direction gave way to the inner-direction which was associated with the rise of Protestantism and Modern Capitalism.

This state of affairs in communications persisted until quite recently. No longer than 75 years ago, it is probably true that most communications were face-to-face, leaving aside the growing newspaper, magazine and book publishing industries. A widespread public school system, the Chautauqua circuit, the orators at the political rallies, the family fireside, the legitimate stage for big and small cities, the social functions of the church, the chamber of commerce

and the labor union—these were the principal means of communication.

## II

Into this scene burst the technical and business revolution of communications almost within the lifetimes of most of us. The motion pictures, radio, and TV now more than fill the time formerly taken up by the older rituals of entertainment. Indeed the market has spread even beyond the mass media and now is the organizing medium for all professional music and personal talent entertainment. Information transmission by radio and TV have completed the attenuation of face-to-face communication begun by newspapers, magazines and books. Indeed the face-to-face communication of information is now limited to the minimum of physical meetings in the school, the church, and other social organizations, plus that which takes place via rumor, and that which takes place in the family in and between bouts with the TV set and other media. Similarly the role of the mass media in orientation (or interpretation) has grown at the expense of that of the other institutions. In a very real and perhaps frightening sense communications are now part of what may properly be called "cultural industry."

What becomes of feedback from audience to communicator under these conditions? Direct feedback is shrunk to the small volume of fan mail. Indirectly a sort of feedback is supplied by pressures exerted for "codes" of ethics in the operation of the mass media. Being administered by the same groups to which they apply, these codes are inherently weak and unenforceable except through the operation of conscience. The economic openness of the publishing industry which was a partial corrective for the loss of feedback until late in the 19th Century has now virtually disappeared. The huge capital sums required to start a successful newspaper, TV station, or motion picture production effectively exclude fresh and experimental ventures. And in radio and TV fields, the shortage of the spectrum space limits the numbers of stations. On the whole the possibility of effective feedback to the men who run our mass media is negligible today. This is a

challenge which has two facets. One looks to the policy of the media. The other looks to the frustration on the part of audiences.

The managements of the business establishments which operate that part of our cultural industry which we call the mass media are *legally* responsible to their stockholders to maximize the profitability of their businesses. Strictly speaking, they are therefore *not* responsible, except through their consciences, for any of the effects of their operations, except to their stockholders for profits. They may be said to be substantially *autonomous* in the policies they pursue. Thus far, I have sketched a theory of the historical development of communications. What of it? Of what importance is it? What are the phenomena in our society which presumptively relate to the mass media and which should concern all of us?

## III

On the surface, I suspect that we would all agree that the condition of the American mind (if such a figure of speech is permissible) is such as to cause concern. As a people we are materially better off than ever before, but at the same time anxious and fear-ridden. While our standard of living is higher than ever before, materially, we are possibly less secure emotionally than at any time since the depths of the depression of the thirties. To put it simply, we are scared, and we're not sure just what we're scared of. For lack of sureness of what we're scared of we fasten on the possibility that we might lose this material prosperity. We are vaguely afraid of a depression, but we don't know whether we may have one or not, and we are confused as to what if anything can be done to prevent one. One clear and obvious target of our fears is communism. To protect us against the possibility of external threats, we know that our military have the most destructive weapons science can produce. The original A-bomb is replaced by the more destructive H-bomb, and it in turn is to be replaced by the still more destructive C-bomb. We have super-sonic bombers at hand to deliver these bombs to foreign soil. We have, or we hope we have, interceptors, guided missiles and submarines capable of protecting us against

bombs from our enemies. Yet in spite of, and indeed, because of, the power of these weapons we are anxious. On the domestic front, we cannot personalize the possible causes of a business depression, but we can vent our anxieties on communists, suspected communists, and assorted individuals who do not measure up to our vague standards of conformity as to what is right and proper. Because *ideas* are dangerous — and they always are to blind conformists — we mistrust them and we treat their "thinkers" as possible troublemakers. But in spite of our efforts to protect ourselves, we are left with an uncomfortable feeling of anxiety, frustration, and emptiness.

Because you and I are especially concerned with the posture of religion and of the Protestant churches in this setting, let me refer briefly to the position of religion in New Haven, where the pilot study of the Communications Research Project has been conducted. One in two of those who are in some degree attached to a Protestant denomination in New Haven are members of churches there. Of these members of a Protestant church about one in three attend worship service on a given Sunday. At the rate at which Protestant churches are obtaining new members in New Haven, their membership will decline, for they are gaining only 3.9 new members per 100 members already on the church rolls, as contrasted with the 5.6 needed to maintain a constant membership.

While not too actively interested in a Protestant church, New Havenites are quite attached to TV and radio. New Haven is just short of 80 percent saturation with TV and almost 100 percent saturation with radio. Three out of five of the Protestant families have a TV set. But five out of six of the Roman Catholics have TV sets. This tendency exists in each social and economic class. To a lesser degree, Jews and families of mixed faiths are also more likely to have TV sets than are Protestants. To the extent that this is true country-wide, Protestant communicators have a potential competitive advantage in reaching other groups and a relative disadvantage in reaching their own group.

While the New Havenite's use of both TV and radio is heavy, TV is regularly used about three times as much as is radio. It is interesting to note that the pattern of viewing and listening is not significantly different as between the different faiths — as far as the gross quantities are concerned.

One important fact which we found Protestant ministers to be generally unaware of is that there is a large audience for religious programs. At least one such program is regularly used by more than half (three out of five) of the New Havenites. What is this audience for religious programs like?

The religious radio and TV audience as a whole is not significantly different from the non-audience as far as social class, education, and age are concerned. It does have proportionately more lower income families and more lower middle families in it than there are in the non-audience, because of the weight of Bishop Sheen's audience in the figures. But, and this fact should be emphasized to every minister who uses the media, — and those who are indifferent to the media as well — the unchurched are proportionately as large a part of the audience for religious TV and radio as they are of the non-audience.

An essential part of the findings in New Haven is that Roman Catholics are the most loyal users of religious broadcasts. Sixty-four percent of them regularly use a religious broadcast, as against 58 percent for Protestants, 46 percent for Jews, and 59 percent for mixed families. Roman Catholics are also the most loyal users of programs of their own faith. Forty-one percent of the Roman Catholic families use five Roman Catholic programs, while only 14 percent of the Protestant families use 11 Protestant programs. Protestant families, moreover, are as likely to use Roman Catholic programs as they are their own (14 percent in both cases) while the proportion of Roman Catholics using their own programs is ten times as large as the proportion of Roman Catholics using Protestant programs. Bishop Sheen's single TV program in New Haven has an audience twice as large as the average weekly attendance at Sunday morning worship service in all the Protestant and Orthodox Churches of

New Haven, combined. The Roman Catholic audience is broadly representative of the population of New Haven, but with a concentration in the white-collar, skilled and semi-skilled occupations with below average income. The Protestant religious audience is heavily weighted with the best educated, highest income people, and the appeal of National Council radio programs is predominantly to people over 65 years of age.

Our findings concerning the ministry in New Haven seem to me to be of even greater importance than the information I have just summarized, for it is in the attitudes of ministers that I look to you to effect substantial reorientation in the future. Protestant ministers in New Haven seem not to have had time in their busy lives to realize what the mass media generally, and TV and radio in particular mean to their parishioners or to their society. In our New Haven study we found that less than half of the 102 Protestant ministers even had a TV set of their own—a much smaller saturation than we found among lay Protestants. Most ministers in New Haven have given no thought to the Church's possible strategy in the use of TV and radio. This to me was one of the few really shocking facts which our study developed.

Moreover, in visiting parishioners, few ministers indicated that they ever mentioned constructive use of the mass media in the leisure time of the parishioners. Few ministers had any understanding of the nature of the audiences for radio and TV. In interviews with almost 100 New Haven ministers, not a single minister referred to the possibility that radio and TV might be useful in the religious education of children. And almost all of them visualize the audience of the radio and TV programs which they do participate in—religious programs, now I am referring to—as being limited to shut-ins—people already nominally attached to the church who are prevented by illness or age from physical church attendance. If ever there was a self-defeating policy for using the mass media, this is it. The respectable Protestant churches when they do use radio and TV seem to tacitly assume at the local level

that there is no evangelical purpose to be served; they seem to assume that they are addressing individuals who already are church members. The fact, however, is, and I am repeating myself deliberately for emphasis, that the unchurched are already listening to religious programs in the same proportion that they are in the total population, in relation to the church members.

From our New Haven study and from other sociological and psychological studies, the hypothesis seems probable that at the root of the emptiness, anxiety and frustration of the population at large there lie several inter-related processes, which are conducive to this condition. One of these is called anomie or alienation—the state of mind and of emotion marked by a feeling of being lost, of being helpless, of being unimportant—and basically of being unrespected and unloved.

It should be said that there is still a vital core of people who rather tend to fit the description of mentally healthy people: The non-anxious, non-anomic person is apt to be able to respect himself and others too. He is able to look at himself and enjoy what he sees. He knows that he deserves respect because he respects himself and others. He is able to see others as being like himself composed of traits which are varied, some of which are things to be proud of, others, things which are not so admirable, but all of which are interesting and important parts of himself. Respecting authority in all its forms, in season he is able to be independent of it otherwise. Understanding the interesting qualities in himself, he sees the world as composed of people who are infinitely varied. He is able to see that there may be two or more sides to a controversial issue or person. He resents exploitation of himself and doesn't practice exploitation of others. Appreciating the sources and occasions for strength and weakness, he is not inclined to glorify the former or despise the latter. He is permissive (rather than punitive), tolerant (rather than destructive), and capable of a range of emotional "temperature" (rather than cold). He tends to be bored by stereotypes rather than to live by them.

Still another process (along with anomie



and stereotypy) demands attention because of its prevalence. You will recall that associated with the rise of Protestantism went the growing substitution of the inner-directed style of character direction. With the development of the modern mass media and the tightly knit technology by which our society produces a relative abundance of material goods and services has come a new style of character direction which David Riesman calls the other-directed. In it the individual internalizes at an early age the characterological equivalent of a radar set by which he forms his tastes and guides his judgments. With this style of character direction, the standards evolved by the peer group tend to displace the conscience and tradition as the guide. Other direction is the essence of the appeals of advertising and salesmanship. And the agencies of mass communication both facilitate and themselves create these standards. The significance of "other direction" for the church probably lies in the derogation of the individual which it implies. To the extent that it is practice—and it is usually blended with elements of conscience and tradition in each individual—it probably facilitates the anomic and stereotypical view of life.

#### IV

After what must seem to many to be a long prologue, I am finally at the point of talking about communications theory *per se*. Let me begin with a word of caution to myself and to you. If you insist on the standards of proof which are romantically assumed to be associated with the scientific laboratory,—proof of a highly rigorous sort where casual relationships may be established with high statistical reliability—then you will be vastly disappointed in communications theory. For there is precious little theory where proof of this order is available. However, it would seem unreasonable to hold that because one cannot demonstrate in the laboratory sense of the term that a given type of TV program—let us say a Crime program—can cause a child to become a delinquent, that therefore such programs are benign and wholesome. Such reasoning is like arguing that because a single drop of water will not

dissolve a large stone, therefore constantly falling water will not wear away the rock.

The remainder of my remarks will set forth some of the concepts from communications theory which seem to be relevant, and then finally conclude with some of the questions which these considerations cast up for your consideration.

The first communications theory concept which I should identify is one which I have already exhibited to you; namely a theory of the institutional development of communications policy in a broad sense. This, it seems to me, is a threshold concept in communications theory. W. I. Thomas, the sociologist, once uttered a remark which seems applicable—indeed one which should be well-remembered. He said: If men define a situation as real, then for them it is real in its consequence. In other words, if communications problems are to be meaningfully attacked, they must be significantly structured in relation to the context in which they are thought to exist.

My second and third concepts relate to the content of communications and to the audience and had better be considered together. Communication by TV, radio, or motion pictures is the same as face to face communication in theoretical essentials. There is a communicator with something to communicate. There is the content as produced. There is an audience, potential and actual, which he seeks to influence toward a certain kind of attitude or behavior. The content, whether in face to face communication or by TV is a flow of representations in many layers and in many dimensions. Words are only one of the layers of representation. There are all of the myriad complexities which are conveyed by pitch, pace, and intonation. There are all the layers of meaning which are carried by the visual track, the gestures, the clothes, the size and configuration of physical objects, etc., etc. In both cases, you can think of the content of communications as being a sort of commerce between the communicator and the audience in which the content symbols are the medium of exchange through which both parties give and receive something. It is important to understand



that audience members act *on* the content of the communication. And that the man who is not part of your audience is in a negative sense acting on your content by turning his attention to some other communications content, be it a game of bridge, or whatever. When they are in your audience, individuals take the content you give them and they mold it to fit their own individual needs and values. There are many exciting studies which in recent years have proved this point. In taking and molding your program content, the audience members use not only the explicit layer of meaning in the content (the literal meaning of the words, for example) but also innumerable latent or contextual dimensions of the meaning of the content. On the other side of the microphone (or of the pulpit) in producing the content, the communicator builds both contextual or implicit and also explicit layers of meaning into it. This is why we think of the process of producing a TV program, or a sermon, as ultimately an artistic process. My point in giving you this general analysis of the communication process is to show you that how — the technique — is not to be considered apart from the *what*, and that in making the communication many dimensions of configurations of meaning are employed, ranging from the most explicit, least ambiguous words and gestures to the most subtle and inconspicuous contextual dimensions. Once you know *what* you want to say, and *to whom*, the *how* part of the problem will pretty much take care of itself. To deny this is to assert that technique and technology are paramount and that the substance of policy is of minor importance. If the essence of TV and of pulpit communications are so similar in essentials then, what distinguishes the process of communication in the two situations? The answer to this is, I think, simple. Because of the electronic technology you are able to broadcast no magic messages. The magic lies not in the message, but in the fact that TV permits so many people to see and hear you.

To be sure, the context provided by the technique invites different uses and different meanings for the communication content.

In the case of the physical church, the fact of congregate assembly and the psychology of the group is conducive to a different kind of participation by the audience than in the case of TV. With TV the more casual physical context where your program is viewed in the same living room and over the same set which last night carried the lively variety show establishes some psychological elements which need to be considered. But these conditions are only to be considered in the light of *what* you have to communicate, and *to whom*.

I am so much impressed with the importance of the context of the communications message that I am often tempted to formulate a "principle" about as follows. It is commonly believed that the explicit verbal message is the most important part of the communication, if not the only part worthy of attention. For my part, I would say, though I may be over-stressing the point, that I would rather pay careful attention to the context in which the verbal message is to be presented. Audiences are attracted in, and by a situation or communications field. One might say that the degree of audience involvement, the degree of audience readiness to take the content and make it part of themselves, is proportional to the extent to which they find the communications field, or context congenial to or compatible with the tension states of their own personal psychological fields. The wise communicator, I should say, will seek to establish a maximum degree of empathy between the context of his communication and that of the audience he wishes to influence. Under those conditions he can then present to the audience his message, to the extent that it is implicit in his context, without risking rejection. On the explicit level, he can state his verbal message in a number of ways, providing he does not risk disrupting rapport by breaking his empathetic relation with the audience. This means he should not state it in terms which threaten or disturb the audience members so much that they will leave the communications field. This does not mean that the communicator cannot challenge the audience. It simply means that the outside limit of the

effective degree of challenge may be the minimum degree of empathy which the communicator has established through the context for the particular type of audience members whom he wishes to influence by the challenge.

### V

To illustrate the application of these concepts to the religious radio and TV programs analyzed in the New Haven study, please permit me to use some analogies.

Figures of speech are helpful, so permit me to call up the figurative picture of five long, attractive cafeteria steam tables. One cafeteria carries the Peale line of spiritual food. In it all of the table top openings are sealed up—shiny but empty, except for one section where a single tray offers one kind of food. It is a sort of spiritual Ovaltine. If you have trouble going to sleep at nights, it will help you relax and sleep soundly. If you have inter-personal problems with your boss or your fellow-workers at the shop, taking of this food will help you. It comes from sound Christian, Protestant materials. It is definitely not a substitute. And you are advised that you can procure it from your local church as well as directly from the Bible. It is practical and efficient. But it is by no means a balanced spiritual diet. And I am sure that Dr. Peale would agree that it doesn't even pretend to offer everything that your policy promises. Why should it, when it is only one program, and perhaps the fare can be rounded out on other steam tables? But today the Peale program is your most often used program. And if this is what you have to say on radio and TV, our depth studies in the New Haven project have established that you are speaking to people who take a very narrow and self-centered view of themselves and of religion.

At the second cafeteria—this time on radio—is displayed the food which is the customary staple of the typical National Council Church. Here in the Sockman cafeteria the fare is again limited to one segment of the steam table. In this cafeteria the food is good, solid, nourishing stuff, pleasingly presented. I think of it as being like a good joint of roast beef with Yorkshire

pudding. Its distinguishing characteristic is that it is really only suitable to the digestive system of the man who is a rational being in the tradition of half a century ago. The cook's recipe frankly aims it at "maturer age groups" and here I quote of an "intellectuality somewhere between the theologian of the seminary and the popularizing pep-talk variety." Small wonder that we find one-third of the customers here are over 65 years of age. Again, if this is what you have to say on radio and TV, you are speaking to a small and regrettably diminishing group.

The third cafeteria is where the Lutherans serve "This is the Life." Here we find more of the table-top openings filled than in either of the first two cafeterias. Indeed you might say this one serves a middle class table d'hôte. The staple ingredient in this wholesome, but limited, dinner is Christian morality. Its attraction is centered on families in the middle income and age brackets. Unlike the Roman Catholic programs it has little obvious appeal for the frustrated, the insecure and the anonymous segments of the population. Sometimes in order to keep within the limits of its budget, the main dish is underdone and fails to make its point. On the whole, though, this program has more levels of meaning and a broader potential public than either the Peale or the Sockman programs.

To visit the fourth cafeteria, let's go down the street to Bishop's cafeteria. When we enter it we are surprised. For all possible table-top openings are occupied by taste-whetting dishes. For viewers whose appetite is spurred by anxiety there is the reassuring panoply of authority and dignity represented by the robes and the stature of the Virgin and Child. For those whose appetite feeds on frustration and emptiness, there is a generous appetizer of fairly low humor, followed by choice of Fried Freud, Baked Marx, and Barbecued Kinsey. To gratify the less-educated, low-income customer, the establishment provides emotional mood music evocative of a cat playing with a mouse. Regardless of what menu is announced by the fluorescent sign over the door each week, the staples are the same, though the style of serving changes. For example, on a second week

it might be that the staples were Roast Science, Kipperd Social Reform, and Natural Man with Dumplings. A special section is supplied with portions of these basic foods, but with garnishings designed to catch the eye of the college graduate. Such garnishings include frequent sprinkling of names such as Hegel, Spencer, and Dewey coupled with provocative questions phrased around central concepts taken from the writings of such men. I should add that no customer is permitted to eat his fill. Portions are artfully limited in size, so that the customers ask to seek the cook to find out how they can get a larger and more continuous supply.

The fifth cafeteria is a Protestant cafeteria, but it is empty. It awaits both a program and a public. Don't misunderstand me. The public is there, only it is in the street, not in the cafeteria. And don't ask me to be specific about the kind of spiritual food which will be dispensed in it. That is a decision which is up to you and your Churches. It depends on how you choose to state and implement the role of radio and television in the policy of the Protestant Churches of America. I can, however, offer a couple of suggestions. In the first place, it must be a program which has a solid continuing policy with the promise of serving the same clientele each week. I don't see how it is possible to build a maximally successful program if you put a different policy before the public each week under the same title. This may be a good way to please the participating organizations, as organizations; it is, I am convinced, no way at all to build an audience for the Protestant religion. My second suggestion grows naturally from the first. The program in this now empty cafeteria must be viewer—or listener—centered, not communicator centered. Possibly the most serious error that a communicator can make is to fashion a program that is aimed to convince or move himself. Its purpose is to convince or move the audience. My third suggestion is that this missing program must be eloquent of the policy of Protestantism and militant Protestantism at that.

If time permitted I would like to discuss some of the research tools we have developed

and are using in communications research. Some of them are derived from clinical psychology, as when we employ essentially a non-directive interview technique to elicit patterns of attitudes and tastes towards mass media fare. Others are new and aim to explore some of the dimensions of meaning, as with the semantic differential which we have applied to the measurement of the kind and degree of stereotyping in television programs and in audiences. Also in this category are tools as time-use diaries aimed at determining just how people spend their time. There have been many studies of how people spend their money income. There is great need for information on how they spend their time as it relates to religion, and the mass media and other leisure time pursuits.

## VI

By way of conclusion, let me submit some issues to you for your thoughtful consideration.

Should you not pursue a constant re-examination of your church policies in the light of the contemporary socio-political context in which the churches seek to communicate with the American people? Taking due note of the fact that the technology of mid-20th Century America and particularly of our mass media tend to minimize the attention given to congregate assembly as a form of communication, should you not re-appraise the relative role of the physical church facilities and the mass media as vehicles for communicating your faith and your program?

If we assume that your Protestant Churches know what their substantive policies and programs are, then the religious communications policy issue becomes merely one of instrumentation. This does not, however, mean that you should turn the problem of how to use the mass media over to your friends in the advertising agencies and TV networks and invite them to tell you what your responsibilities are for religious radio and TV programming, or even how you should construct your programs. Quite frankly, I was shocked when I learned that precisely this was the attitude of some of the people in the Broadcasting and Film Commission, and I told them so. Salvation is neither

psychologically nor conceptually analogous to automobiles, and I think you put the broadcaster in an impossible position when you ask him to tell you what you should be doing with TV, or when you ask him to tell you *how* to use TV unless you simultaneously tell him what you want to say.

The mass media pose precisely the same bureaucratic problem to the lay educational system as they do to the churches. If most of our population's exposure to our culture takes place outside the four walls of the school, what is the relative size of the budget which should be assigned to in-school as against general adult-education. And how should TV and radio be utilized in general adult education? Similarly with the churches I would suppose that you face the problem: if most of the population's spiritual needs are being filled with substitute gratifications from our mass culture outside the church walls, what is the relative emphasis, in budget and in program, which you should devote to activity within the physical church as against activity directed toward the population at large through the mass media and otherwise? I have had more personal experience with educational bureaucracy than with its religious counterpart, but I would hazard the guess that you face much the same problem as do educators in bringing about the necessary recognition of the degree of obsolescence which exists in program and in the attitudes of officialdom.

Somehow it seems easier for us to accept and write-off obsolescence in physical plant than it is to replace obsolescent budgets, obsolescent programs of work, and obsolescent administrators. This is the problem of strategy and religious logistics, if I may be allowed a military figure of speech for the church militant.

Finally, I would submit that you might well re-examine your curricula for training ministers in the light of the policy and strategy which you develop for the Protestant Churches to meet the exigencies of today. If this calls for the writing of new textbooks, write them. Make yourselves experts in those facets of our culture which currently set severe limits on the effectiveness of the churches. Prove once again that technology, far from being the object of loyalty and devotion which it now is for a large part of our population is in reality but the means by which our lives may be made richer and more Christian. This technology more and more poses the issue of the integrity of the individual in his relation to external earthly authority. In the hands of our business and political institutions, this technology more and more tends to subordinate the individual to this substantially autonomous earthly authority. Is it not the historic task and opportunity of the Protestant Churches now as it was centuries ago to use the latest technology to protect the integrity and sanctity of the individual against such threats?

---

Membership will bring the Journal, RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, to a friend for a year and keep him in contact with the frontiers of thought and experimentation in religious education and related fields. Membership will also provide fellowships in a local chapter of the R.E.A. if your friend lives in one of the many large cities which have chapters.

To provide a gift of membership in the R.E.A., fill in the blank below and send with check for \$5.00 to the New York office of the R.E.A. If received in sufficient time, the office will send notice of the gift, along with the Nov-Dec. 1954 Journal, so as to reach your friend before Christmas.

Religious Education Association, 545 West 111th St., New York 25, N. Y.

I enclose \_\_\_\_\_ for a Christmas gift membership in the R.E.A.

FOR (Print name and address of recipient)

FROM (Print name and address of sender)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street and Number \_\_\_\_\_

Street and Number \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zone \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zone \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_



# Significant Evidence

ERNEST M. LIGON, Ph.D.  
Professor of Psychology, Union College

WILLIAM A. KOPPE, Ph.D.  
Research Associate, Union College

*The purpose of this column is to keep religious educators abreast of the relevant significant research in the general field of psychology. Its implications for methods and materials in religious education are clear. Religious educators may well take advantage of every new finding in scientific research.*

*Each abstract or group is preceded by an evaluation and interpretative comment, which aims to guide the reader in understanding the research reported.*

*All of these abstracts are from PSYCHOLOGICAL ABSTRACTS, and used by permission of that periodical. The abstract number is Volume 27, Number 11, November, 1953.*

## I. ABSTRACTS DEALING WITH CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

Far reaching effects of institutions are reviewed in three abstracts.

7663. BOSSERT, OTTO. WELCHEN EINFLUSS HAT DAS HEIM IM GEGENSATZ ZUM ELTERNHAUS AUF DIE SEELISCHE UND KÖRPERLICHE ENTWICKLUNG DES KINDES? (What is the influence of the institution, as compared with the parental home, on the psychological and physiological development of the child?) *Prax. Kinderpsychol. Kinderpsychiat.*, 1953, 2, 1-5. — Many institutions have negative aspects and it is important to work toward a betterment of conditions. In many cases children are better off in institutions than in inadequate home environments. Among the cases for whom placement may be desirable are children from broken homes, neglected, retarded, and chronically sick children. — A. O. Ross.

7664. BOWLBY, JOHN; ROBERTSON, JAMES, & ROSENBLUTH, DINA. A TWO-YEAR-OLD GOES TO THE HOSPITAL. *Psychoanal. Stud. Child*, 1952, 7, 82-94. — At age 2 yrs., the hospitalized child may show an intense clinging to the mother which can last for weeks, months, or years, or may show rejection of the mother as a love object which may be temporary or permanent. — D. Prager.

7678. HASSELMANN-KAHLERT, MARGARET. EINIGE BEOBSACHTUNGEN DIE ENTWURZELTEN KLEINST- UND KLEINKINDEN. (Some observations on uprooted infants and preschool children.) *Prax. Kinderpsychol. Kinderpsychiat.*, 1953, 2, 15-18. — Among the DP children in a children's village, serious developmental retardation was observed and attributed to separation from the mother. Head banging was common and could be stopped by increasing the attention shown to the child exhibiting this behavior. While the institution was operated like a hospital, and before reorganization to a cottage plan, children did not learn to speak until 3 to 4 years. After reorganization, speech started between 1 and 2 years. Finger and brush painting was found to have therapeutic value with disturbed and withdrawn children. — A. O. Ross.

Those having opportunities to counsel parents in child-rearing will be interested in the following abstract.

7682. JACKSON, EDITH B., KLATSKIN, ETHELYN H., & WILKIN, LOUISE C. EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN RELATION TO DEGREE OF FLEXIBILITY OF MATERNAL ATTITUDE. *Psychoanal. Stud. Child*, 1952, 7, 393-428. — Each of 3 mothers exposed to the same philosophy of child care applied it differently in practice. One was too rigid. One was too permissive. One gave the child freedom at the child's rate but could at the same time set necessary limits. Only the third child appeared to be happy and well adjusted. The ultra-permissive mother is more susceptible to therapy than the ultrarigid mother. — D. Prager.

## II. ABSTRACT RELATED TO EDUCATION

This abstract points to some of the limitations of visual aids.

8007. SMITH, HERBERT A. (U. Nebraska, Lincoln.) INTELLIGENCE AS A FACTOR IN THE LEARNING WHICH RESULTS FROM THE USE OF EDUCATIONAL SOUND MOTION PICTURES. *J. educ. Res.*, 1952, 46, 249-261. — Data obtained from a Program of Educational Enrichment through the use of Motion Pictures yield little evidence to indicate that the use of motion pictures in the class room "greatly affects the ranking of students with respect to the amount which they learn." The data likewise show that bright students profited more than dull students with respect to actual learning as measured by tests. — M. Murphy.

## III. ABSTRACTS RELATED TO CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

This abstract suggests positive ways to help the aged in institutions.

7697. GOLDFARB, ALVIN. (Homes for Aged and Infirm Hebrews, New York.) THE ORIENTATION OF STAFF IN A HOME FOR THE AGED. *Ment. Hyg.*, N. Y., 1953, 37, 76-83. — A discussion of behavior disorders commonly found in the aged



inmates of institutions caring for this type of patient. The necessity for institutional staff members being properly oriented to aberrant behavior in these patients is brought out since this is necessary in the prevention of undue hostility on the one hand or over-indulgence on the other. Goldfarb points out the desirability of developing a program built around the patients' untapped capabilities and creating an effective program for living which will result in better care and less staff feelings of guilt and anxiety. — M. A. Seidenfeld.

An intensive study of a single community that provides insights into any local cultural framework.

7720. BROWN, JAMES S. THE FAMILY GROUP IN A KENTUCKY MOUNTAIN FARMING COMMUNITY. *Bull. Ky. agric. Exp. Sta.*, 1952, No. 588, 38 p. — A study was made of the kinship structure of 3 small neighborhoods in Eastern Kentucky. Genealogies, kinship terminology, relationships of parents and their adult children and of adult brothers and sisters, and family groups, of groups of conjugal families in the neighborhood are discussed. Through daily intimate contacts members of family groups built up strong group solidarity. Both they as well as the neighborhood thought as solidarity groups. Mountain people ranked themselves into "classes" or "prestige groups." There was much jealousy of people who succeeded to such an extent that they surpassed their kin. An example of this tendency was the practice of awarding jobs with money incomes (teaching, political, road jobs) on the basis of need rather than on the basis of competence. — A. A. Kramish.

7721. BROWN, JAMES S. THE FARM FAMILY IN A KENTUCKY MOUNTAIN NEIGHBORHOOD. *Bull. Ky. agric. Exp. Sta.*, 1952, No. 587, 42 p. — An investigation was made of the Kentucky mountain social institution — the conjugal family. Customs, family property, daily living conditions, income and expenditures, migration, sex, education, and achievement are discussed. Most activities were carried on within the confines of small farms. The husband was the head of the household, and of all family activities, whereas, the wife was in charge of house duties, the garden and chickens, and was held responsible for the success or failure of the latter enterprises. Marriage was a must. Changes have occurred in the conjugal family today. Divorce is more frequent, with less community pressure to hold the family together. The mountain society has tended to become less family-centered and more individual-centered. — A. A. Kramish.

#### IV. ABSTRACTS RELATED TO BEHAVIOR AND PERSONALITY PROBLEMS

An analysis that pin-points some of the complex factors in prejudice.

7716. HOFSTAETTER, PETER R. (*Catholic U. America, Washington, D. C.*) A FACTORIAL STUDY OF PREJUDICE. *J. Pers.*, 1952, 21, 228-239. — "A questionnaire containing 19 items and among them 6 which can be supposed to elicit anti-Negro or anti-Jewish prejudice was administered to 187 respondents. Factor analysis of the

items revealed five largely independent factors: I. Anti-Negroism, II. Anti-Semitism, III. National pride, IV. Puritanism, V. State-Socialism. There seems no justification for combining these independent dimensions of variability into one type, the 'authoritarian personality,' for instance." 16 references. — M. O. Wilson.

Is healthful sexual behavior based on the control of physiological drives or on broader social values and purposes?

7614. FRANK, LAWRENCE K. SEX AS AN EXPRESSION OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL VALUES. *Pastoral Psychol.*, 1953, 4(31), 55-67. — The belief that sexual relations should be limited to procreation confuses human sexuality with subhuman behavior. We cherish the aspiration of transforming sex into an interpersonal love relationship for mutual fulfillment. But we have neglected to develop an adequate sex ethic through the confusions of anxiety and negation. What governs sexual behavior in humans is not the organic instincts but how one feels toward other persons and what one's life purposes are. Above all a human being wants some order, and meaning in his life. The kind of interpersonal relations that are valued most call for permanent affiliation where the basic needs of life are met in ideal values. — P. E. Johnson.

7621. MILLETT, JOHN A. P. A PSYCHOANALYST'S VIEWPOINT ON SEXUAL PROBLEMS. *Pastoral Psychol.*, 1953, 4(31), 38-41; 44-46. — Self-control when based upon a rigid separation of pleasure and denial is bound to fail. There is confusion of conscience in relation to sexual behavior due to the infantile experiences of denying pleasure by insistence from the parents. "Creative sexual living implies a progressive ability to recognize, understand, and guide the sexual impulse into those forms of expression which bring maximum satisfaction to the self and to the partner, and which leave in their wake no need for self-recrimination or for hostility to others." — P. E. Johnson.

The authoritarian-equalitarian dimension of personality is popular in present research. Here are some of its correlates.

7713. COURTNEY, DOUGLAS; GREER, F. LOYAL, & MASLING, JOSEPH M. LEADERSHIP IDENTIFICATION AND ACCEPTANCE. Philadelphia, Pa.: Institute for Research in Human Relations, 1951. (Rep. No. 1.) 39 p. — The Authoritarian-Equalitarian Scale, correlated .67 with the California Fascism Scale, was administered to 963 representative people in Philadelphia. Mean A-E scores did not vary as a function of race, sex, or age. People with either Italian or Irish ethnic origins were more authoritarian than those with either Russian or English origins. Catholics, Protestants, and Jews were authoritarian in that order. Education and authoritarian were negatively related. The religious difference in A-E scores between Catholics and Protestants was due to the ethnic background of people who were Protestants and Catholics. With education held constant, ethnic differences in A-E mean scores were still significant. — F. L. Greer.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Secularism a Myth.* By EDWIN E. AUBREY. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954. 191 pages. \$2.50.

### I

Has not the time come to clarify our thinking about "secularism" or to stop using the word altogether? Continued debate over secularism, of the sort that has been going on in this country in recent years, seems to this writer, largely a waste of time and sometimes a breeder of unnecessary hostility.

The latest noteworthy contribution to the discussion is Professor Aubrey's little book. It is an illuminating exposition of the subject defined by its sub-title, "Spiritual Values in Secular Culture." To anyone who regards the current criticism of secularism as a disparagement of the secular *as such*, this book should bring a much-needed corrective. The author deprecates "the proposed dissociation of the church from culture." If any critic of secularism is really driving in that direction, this warning is, of course, in order.

Moreover, Mr. Aubrey has recorded important insights concerning the relation of Christianity to the culture, quite apart from the thesis presented in his laconic three-word title. Can anyone question the assertion that Christianity has been significantly and constructively influenced by secular forces, or that secular movements have embodied spiritual values for which Christianity cannot claim credit? These facts should be freely recognized. It would be difficult to put a more pregnant observation in a few words than is contained in the following sentence: "The whole history of the Christian movement exhibits an alternation between periods of what may be called diastole, when Christianity reaches out into culture to absorb elements which it may use for the enrichment of its own life and thought, and periods of systole when the church draws into itself in a contractive movement which tries to exclude cultural forces so as to recover its own uniqueness."

Now, all this tells something important about Christianity and about culture, but does it really throw light on the problem of secularism as that term is currently used by persons who have been discriminating enough to give it a distinctive meaning? Mr. Aubrey lists a considerable number of terms—most of them ending in "ism"—with which secularism has been identified, and he rightly considers the result a sorry confusion. But if secularism be taken to mean humanism, naturalism, nationalism, atheism and what not, why not drop the word secularism and use such relatively precise terms to express what one has in mind?

The current literature of the subject, however, indicates a much more precise meaning that is absent from Mr. Aubrey's list. Indeed, Mr. Aubrey himself, gives us the authentic clue when he says that "secularism" is the modern equivalent for the older theological usage, "the world." In other words secularism denotes "worldliness" as that word was once used to characterize a life lived apart from the religious sanctions to which the person in question gave lip service. More precisely

put, the word secularism, thus used, denotes the non-relevance of religious sanctions to secular matters. The idea is expressed with great force by Will Herberg in his chapter in *Catholicism in America*, to which he and Reinhold Niebuhr contributed by invitation of the editors of *The Commonweal*. "It may seem strange," says Herberg, "to charge such doughty champions of religion as American Catholics with secularism, but what is secularism but the outlook in which religion is separated from life and relegated to a purely private status, peripheral to the vital areas of economics, politics, and culture which are held to have autonomous non-religious foundations? What is secularism, in short, but the conviction that 'business is business,' the affair of the business man, just as religion is the affair of the priest?" (Protestant illustrations come to mind just as readily.) He points this up by reference to the familiar attitude that "resents papal encyclicals on labor and industry as an intrusion of religion into a sphere where it does not properly belong." (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company. 1954.)

That is the bull's eye! Is the church facing any greater foe today than the organized resistance of avowedly religious people to the application of religious sanctions to the handling of their secular affairs? If secularism is not a good word for it, let us choose another one. But since it fits so well the drive to limit the relevance of religion to a private sphere and to rob it of its public and social character, many of us are disposed to use it. In the sense here given it, it is no myth! The opposition to secularism, so defined, is, of course, anything but a disparagement of the secular. Rather, it is an attempt to "redeem" the secular by raising it to the level of religious vocation. And this, needless to say, has no remote connection with ecclesiastical control.

\* If this use of the term secularism is justified, it is important to divest it of the mass of ambiguous connotation of which Mr. Aubrey and other writers complain. Most inept of all uses of the word, it would seem, is that which identifies it with Communism. For Communism is a kind of faith—a secular religion, so to speak—which affirms its total relevance: it subordinates the entire culture to its authority. Secularism, as the word has been defined above, is the extreme opposite of totalitarianism. For total relevance of the prevailing faith, it substitutes non-relevance of any faith to the conduct of secular affairs. Secularism, in this sense, is typically practiced, not by deniers of religion, but by those who adhere to it without social vision and "follow afar off."

There is no law governing our use of words, and in this case there is obviously no consensus. But would it not be helpful to the process of communication if we would make up our minds? — F. Ernest Johnson, Professor Emeritus, Teachers College, Columbia University, N. Y. C.

(Reprinted from *Christianity and Crisis*, Vol. XIV, Number 12, by special permission.)

### II

"In some circles," wrote Winfred E. Garrison

in *Christian Century* a few years back, "the indiscriminate damning of everything that can be called secular is deemed a mark of piety."

This somewhat acid statement is fully borne out in an important new book, *Secularism a Myth*, by Dr. Edwin E. Aubrey, Professor of Religious Thought at the University of Pennsylvania. "The word 'secularism,'" concludes Dr. Aubrey in his careful analysis of one of our time's most pressing problems, "has become a rallying cry for religious forces, much as paganism was in the early Christian church or the 'infidel' in the Middle Ages or popery in seventeenth century Protestantism."

The current drive against secularism is particularly significant for those concerned with preserving our traditional separation of church and state, because its primary target is the American secular public school. If "secularism" is an evil, obviously our secular public schools represent a threat which must be dealt with.

Dr. Aubrey points out that the term "secularism," has become "a catch-all for whatsoever things these Christian leaders want to criticize in the social order," including humanism and materialism; democratic faith and communism; modern education in its separation from religion; rationalism, existentialism and philosophy; the historical method applied to Biblical revelation; and atheism. Such indiscriminating terminology, the author makes clear, "is itself a reflection of the kind of mass thinking that the churches seek to oppose."

Reviewing the revolution in the church from the time of the Renaissance, Dr. Aubrey stresses man's quest for broader knowledge through the ages. When European culture graduated from the total domination of the church, he declares, "theology ceased to be queen of the sciences and its place was taken by philosophy. . . . Society was studied in terms of human experience and law was seen as a matter of convenience in the ordering of human life. Even the nature of human understanding was carefully investigated and the bases of knowledge sought in experience rather than in revelation." Out of this struggle, rationalism was born, "accompanied by a spirit of protest against the trammels of ecclesiastical system."

Dr. Aubrey therefore rejects the suggestion that we are forced to choose between the Christian faith or the wiles of secularism. The so-called secular society, he maintains, offers the church an opportunity for continued growth, and he is disturbed by its tendency "to attack when it might be learning and to treat with contempt many contemporary forces which might be its allies in the struggle for righteousness."

In the past, Dr. Aubrey argues, Christianity has used elements of its environment to enrich and strengthen its own life. Its organization drew on current political and legal theories and practices; its liturgy and its festivals incorporated aspects of other religions and cultures; its very theology was influenced by philosophical thought other than the Christian revelation. Unless today's church leaders can demonstrate the same perspective, the author declares, "the church will find itself in an eddy to the side of the main stream of the life of our time."

This reviewer is particularly impressed with Dr. Aubrey's emphasis on the voluntary character of religion in the United States. It has made the

church "keep closer to the society in which we live," and "come to terms with the people." But there remains, nevertheless, he feels, "too great a tendency to underestimate the spiritual achievements of groups and activities which operate outside the church, and to claim for the Christian movement the origination of ideals and programs of which it was not the real author."

The achievements of the secular society, as Dr. Aubrey makes clear, are not to be brushed aside. Much of spiritual value, particularly in the areas of social welfare and personal liberty, has been accomplished by "groups which did not appeal to the premises of Christian theology for their work." The attack on secularism overlooks these momentous achievements "of secular effort," and at the same time blinds the church to its real foes: "such exemplars of greed as the unscrupulous merchant or the power-hungry secretary of a church board or the corrupt political leader; such hypocrites as the scheming diplomat, the evasive teacher of social problems or the preacher who guards his reputation for eloquence at the expense of honest thinking in his sermons; oppression as that of the domineering wife or father, of the tyrannical trustees of a college, of the autocratic bishop in the church."

"In other words," concludes the author, "the church has no corner on goodness and the secular movements have no corner on badness; correct theology is no guaranty of ethical sensitivity, and an inadequate theory may be found in a very effective worker for spiritual values."

In this brief but very trenchant review of one of the most important issues of our day, Dr. Aubrey has performed a great service. It remains to be seen whether the churches will heed his warning.  
—Philip Jacobson, American Jewish Committee, New York City.



*Not Minds Alone.* By KENNETH IRVING BROWN. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954. 206 pages. \$3.00.

Here is a book nearly any educator can read with profit and one which each faculty and administrative officer in a church-related college should read with care. Its pertinence derives not so much from its originality as from its thoughtful sifting of objectives and its judicious answers to educational problems. In these processes the refining value of Dr. Brown's own experience comes to the foreground.

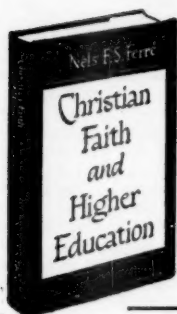
Long a national figure in Christian education, as president of Hiram College, then of Denison University and now executive director of the Danforth Foundation, Dr. Brown has digested the best literature on the problem of educating the whole personality. "Psychic wholeness which accepts life as full of tensions" (p. 65) is no conventional goal for education as he sees it. He has been dealing for thirty years "not with minds alone," but also with the soul of youth that uses those minds.

One important thesis of the book comes out most clearly in the assertion that all teachers should be prepared to show "what makes right right" (p. 177). This amounts to a restoration of Platonism to education whereby all learning is seen to participate ultimately in "the good." The most competent teaching must show how each sub-

"This book will speak to teachers, students,  
administrators and churchmen alike,  
and its voice will be so persuasive as to  
be significant."  
— RAYMOND F. McLAIN

# Christian Faith and Higher Education

by NELS F. S. FERRÉ<sup>7</sup>



Chapter headings  
from a fully-  
rounded philosophy  
of Christian  
education:

- ★ What is Education?
  - ★ What is Religion?
  - ★ What is Christianity?
  - ★ God as Educator
  - ★ Learning from God
  - ★ Community and Communications
  - ★ Human Nature and Education
  - ★ Natural Science and the Social Sciences
  - ★ History, Art and Literature
  - ★ Philosophy and Religion
  - ★ The University and the World
- 251 pages; indexed

"Those of us who believe in the Christian faith as universal truth are concerned to exhibit its educational adequacy. Education should teach nothing but truth; truth is its only authority. Our task is to find the best way to teach religion in education." With these prefatory words one of America's best known religious thinkers turns his keen insight and organizing mind on the accomplishment of this urgent task.

To each phase of the question of religious education Dr. Ferré brings a deep wisdom which is the product of ripe scholarship, careful research and prayerful meditation. His discussion of the problem is timely, and gives a sane, wise view of the whole field.

"Here at last is a book that . . . goes to the heart of the matter, deals with first principles and deserves the most serious consideration of all those concerned with institutions of higher education." — NATHANIEL MICKLEM, Former Principal, Manchester College, Oxford.

\$3.00 at your bookseller

**HARPER & BROTHERS**



ject or field of knowledge, nay each precept, roots in this moral framework. Learning is an occurrence within a scheme of valuation. The teacher must show this inevitably and why the learner takes on obligation with his learning.

Elimination of religion from education has been a tragedy (p. 30) that is being overcome. Brown's book indicates signs of promise in this return from prodigality. His wholesome view of the Church (p. 45), his insistence that Christian education must meet all the academic requirements of secular education (p. 53), his clear knowledge of specific programs of religious practice which nourish the ideals of students (second Interchapter and Chapter VI), make his reexamination of the ultimate goal of education instructive and thought-provoking.

This is delicious reading. As a former teacher of English, Dr. Brown has preserved a pert, spicy, and artistic style woefully missing in most books on education. He sets before his reader vivid illustrations that tell their story without comment. His method of using "Interchapters" for material not coordinate with the rest, gives a 3-D style that makes his book a cinerama of current educational drama. Administrators will want their faculties to absorb the chapter (IV) on "The Terrible Responsibility of the Teacher" if they would remain "unwhiskered" (p. 99). Professors will in turn hope their administrative superiors weren't getting sleepy when they read Chapter V on "Some Problems of Creative Leadership."

It may be that Dr. Brown is overly optimistic in holding that "our faculties today (for the most part) believe that it is not minds alone, but men, with whom they are working" (p. 12). To help them believe it certainly constitutes a noble task. The incipient naturalism of many professors and the naive theism that remains divorced from the subject they teach, on the part of others, could have been highlighted more fully by Dr. Brown.

But no one can say everything in one sentence, or even in one book. One puts down the book with the same feeling that he discovers amidst a pleasant conversation that it is time to go home. He hopes there will be more at another time! — *Louis William Norris*, President, MacMurray College, Jacksonville, Illinois.

*Yearbook of American Churches for 1955.* Edited by BENSON Y. LANDIS. New York: Central Department of Publications and Distribution, National Council of Churches of Christ in the U. S. A. 322 pages. \$4.00.

Statistically the churches of continental United States are growing faster than the population according to the *Yearbook of American Churches for 1955*. If the present rate of growth continues (average 3.09 annually for the last five years) the church membership will be over the 100,000,000 mark in 1956. The total church membership in the 255 religious bodies according "to the latest information" is 94,842,845 — a net increase of

2,565,716 members over 1952 or a gain of 2.8 per cent.

More people are affiliated with more congregations than ever before in the history of the United States. The total number of church members is equal to 59.5 per cent of the population. This compares with 16 per cent in 1850, 30 per cent in 1900, and 57 per cent in 1950. The gains of the churches have been more rapid than the increase of population which is given as 1.7 per cent. The churches are cutting into the backlog of the unchurched. To achieve such a net increase, religious bodies had to gain 3,500,000 new members, for they lost about one per cent of their members each year by death.

To accommodate the growth in 1953 there were 9,082 new congregations established, bringing the total to 294,359 churches of all religious groups. Over \$475,000,000 were spent on new church buildings during 1953 and the total contributions for all purposes from living donors to 46 Protestant denominations and Eastern Orthodox Churches in the United States amounted to \$1,491,114,217 — a gain of 8.9 per cent over the figure of \$1,286,321,160 reported by the same religious groups a year earlier. Under religious education the following statistics are given: In 1953 there were 262,084 Sunday or Sabbath Schools in all religious bodies with 2,740,929 teachers and officers and a total enrollment of 35,389,466 persons. This is an increase of 8.1 per cent over the year of 1952.

The Yearbook is divided into four sections — (I) The Calendar of the Christian year with a table of dates ahead (4 pages); (II) Directory of religious bodies, theological seminaries, colleges and universities, religious periodicals and service agencies. (This is an exceedingly useful directory and contains 248 pages.); (III) Statistical and historical section (50 pages primarily of tables and charts) which has (1) the latest information on membership, religious education, the clergy, and finance, (2) some trends, (3) data on recent church developments, (4) the scriptures — a comparison of developments between Protestants and Roman Catholics, and (5) depositories of church history materials and sources; (IV) An index adds to the practicality of the book.

This is a useful book, one which serves many purposes. It brings some order out of the complex religious situation in the United States. It helps one to be aware of the obvious fact that statistics give but one picture of religious groups. This reviewer found himself wanting more pictures of religious groups — "the pulse beats," the educational programs, and the effectiveness of the various religious groups. But this book gives statistics that all who are concerned about religious groups may well study, restudy, and study again. — *Leonard A. Stidley*, Professor of Religious Education, Graduate School of Theology, Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio.



## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

**PRESIDENT** — Samuel P. Franklin, Dean,  
School of Education, University of  
Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pa.

**CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD** — David R.  
Hunter, Director, Department of  
Education, National Council of the  
Protestant Episcopal Church, Green-  
wich, Conn.

**TREASURER** — Glenn Garbutt, Man-  
agement Consultant, New York City.

**VICE-PRESIDENTS** — Msgr. Thomas J.  
Quigley, Superintendent, Catholic  
Schools, Diocese of Pittsburgh, Pitts-  
burgh, Pa.

Judah Pilch, Executive Director,  
American Association of Jewish Edu-  
cation, New York City.

F. Ernest Johnson, National Council  
of Churches, New York City.

**RECORDING SECRETARY** — Paul B.  
Maves, Professor, Drew Theological  
Seminary, Madison, New Jersey.

### COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

**WALTER HOUSTON CLARK**, Chairman,  
Dean, School Religious Education,  
Hartford, Connecticut.

Council of the Y.M.C.A., New York  
City.

**VIRGINIA CORWIN**, Head Department of  
Religion, Smith College, Northamp-  
ton, Mass.

**ROLAND G. SIMONITSCH, C.S.C.**, Pro-  
fessor of Religion, University of  
Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana.

**R. H. EDWIN ESPY**, Executive Secretary,  
Student Department of the National

**SEYMOUR SMITH**, Department of Re-  
ligion in Higher Education, Divinity  
School, Yale University, New Haven,  
Conn.

### COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH

**MALCOLM STRACHAN**, Chairman,  
Chaplain, Groton School in Massa-  
chusetts, and Consultant to Episcopal  
Parish and Secondary Schools for the  
Department of Education of the Na-  
tional Council of the Protestant Epis-  
copal Church.

**GORDON E. JACKSON**, Professor of Phi-  
losophy and Religious Education,  
Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Semi-  
nary, Pittsburgh, Penn.

**PHOCAS ANGELOTOS**, Secretary for Re-  
ligious Education, Greek Archdiocese  
of America, Garrison, N. Y.

**SISTER MARY JANET, S.C.**, Commission  
on American Citizenship, Catholic  
University of America, Washington,  
D. C.

**J. DONALD BUTLER**, Professor of Phi-  
losophy of Education, Princeton The-  
ological Seminary, Princeton, N. J.

**OSCAR JANOWSKY**, Professor, City Col-  
lege, New York City, also Chairman  
of the Commission for the Study of  
Jewish Education in the U. S.

**DENTON R. COKER**, Department of  
Christian Education, Southeastern  
Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake  
Forest, North Carolina.

**JOHN E. KELLY**, Assistant, National  
Center, Confraternity of Christian  
Doctrine, Washington, D. C.

**CHARLES DONAHUE**, Professor of Eng-  
lish, Fordham University, New York  
City.

**JEROME G. KERWIN**, Chairman, Chi-  
cago Institute of Social and Religious  
Studies and Professor of Political Sci-  
ence, University of Chicago, Chicago,  
Ill.

**WESNER FALLAW**, Professor of Re-  
ligious Education, Andover-Newton  
Theological Seminary.

**ERNEST LIGON**, Director, Character Re-  
search Project, Union College, Sche-  
nectady, N. Y.

**JACOB HARTSREIN**, Dean, Graduate  
School, Long Island University,  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

**GEORGE MICHAELIDES**, President  
Schauffler College, Cleveland, Ohio.

**FRANK HERRIOTT**, Professor of Re-  
ligious Education, Union Theological  
Seminary, New York City.

**SYLVAN SCHWARTZMAN**, Professor of  
Religious Education, Hebrew Union  
College, Cincinnati, Ohio.

**LEO L. HONOR**, Professor of Education,  
Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cog-  
nate Learning, Philadelphia, Pa.

**HELEN SPAULDING**, Associate Director  
of Religious Education, Dept. Re-  
search and Survey, National Council  
of Churches, Chicago, Ill.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

### MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Phocas Angelotos — Secretary for Religious Education, Greek Archdiocese of America, Garrison, N. Y.
- Edna M. Baxter — Professor, School of Religious Education, Hartford, Conn.
- Edward W. Blakeman — Educational Consultant, Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, Calif.
- Thomas A. Brady — Vice-President, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri.
- Israel S. Chipkin — Executive Vice-President, Jewish Education Committee, New York City.
- Alvin J. Cooper — Board of Education, United Church of Canada, Toronto, Canada.
- Joseph A. Diamond — Director, Bureau of Jewish Education, Toronto, Canada.
- Earl Dimmick — Superintendent of Public Schools, Pittsburgh, Pa.
- Samuel Dinin — Executive Director, Bureau of Jewish Education, Los Angeles, Cal.
- Wesner Fallaw — Professor, Andover-Newton Theological Seminary, Newton Center, Mass.
- George B. Ford — Corpus Christi Roman Catholic Church, New York City.
- Solomon B. Freehof — Rabbi, Rodef Shalom Temple, Pittsburgh, Pa.
- Emanuel Gamoran — Executive Director, Commission of Jewish Education, The American Hebrew Congregations, New York City.
- Frank Grebe — Minister, Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City.
- Simon Greenberg — Vice-Chancellor, Jewish Theological Seminary, New York City.
- Mildred Greene — Director of Religious Education, Presbyterian Church, Madison, New Jersey.
- Virgil M. Hancher — President, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa.
- Hugh Hartshorne — Professor, Emeritus, Divinity School, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.
- Jacob I. Hartstein — Dean, Graduate School, Long Island University, New York City.
- Vasile Hategan — Roumanian Orthodox Church, New York City.
- Charles E. Hendry — Professor, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada.
- R. J. Henle, S.J. — Dean, Graduate School, St. Louis University, St. Louis, Mo.
- Frank W. Herriott — Professor, Union Theological Seminary, New York City.
- S. J. Helleb — Superintendent Catholic Schools, Buffalo, N. Y.
- Leo H. Honor — Professor, Dropsie College, Philadelphia, Pa.
- Walter Howlett — Executive Secretary, Greater New York Committee on Released Time, New York City.
- John E. Kelly — National Center, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D. C.
- Jerome G. Kerwin — Chairman, Chicago Institute of Social and Religious Studies, Chicago, Ill.
- John L. Knight — President, Baldwin-Wallace College, Berea, Ohio.
- Gerald E. Knoll — Executive Secretary, Division of Christian Education, National Council of Churches of Christ, New York City.
- Hughbert H. Landram — Executive Secretary, Department of Christian Education, Church Federation of Greater Chicago, Chicago, Ill.
- Ernest M. Ligon — Director, Character Research Project, Union College, Schenectady, N. Y.
- Frank McKibben — Professor, Garrett Biblical Institute, Evanston, Ill.
- Imogene McPherson — Protestant Council of the City of New York, New York City.
- Donald M. Maynard — Professor, School of Theology, Boston University, Boston, Mass.
- Sister Mary Janet Miller, S.C. — Commission on American Citizenship, Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C.
- Randolph C. Miller — Professor, Divinity School, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.
- Levi A. Olan — Rabbi, Temple Emanuel, Dallas, Texas.
- Howard Kubendall — Headmaster, Mt. Hermon School, Mt. Hermon, Mass.
- Erwin Shaver — Director, Department of Weekday Religious Education, Division of Christian Education, National Council of Churches of Christ, Chicago, Ill.
- George N. Shuster — President, Hunter College, New York City.
- Seymour Smith — Professor Divinity School, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.
- O. M. Walton — Executive Secretary, Allegheny County of Churches, Pittsburgh, Pa.
- Frank T. Wilson — Dean, School of Religion, Howard University, Washington, D. C.
- Kenneth S. Wills — Department of Christian Education of the Canadian Council of Churches, Toronto, Canada.

### REGIONAL DIRECTORS (Area Chairmen)

- New England — Ernest W. Kuebler, American Unitarian Association, Boston, Mass.
- Tri-State — Lawrence C. Little, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pa.
- Southeast — Myron T. Hopper, College of Bible, Lexington, Ky.
- Lake Michigan — Leon Fram, Rabbi, Temple Israel, Detroit 2.
- Southwest-Rocky Mountain — James Seehorn Seneker, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Tex.
- Pacific — Stewart G. Cole, Educational Director, National Conference of Christians and Jews, Los Angeles, Calif.

(The Officers, Standing Committee Chairmen and the Regional Directors  
are also Members of Board of Directors)

CURRENT PERIODICAL SERIES

PUBLICATION NO.: 915

TITLE: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

VOLUME: 50

ISSUES: 1 - 6

DATE: January - December 1955

This publication is reproduced by agreement with the publisher. Extensive duplication or resale without permission is prohibited.

University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1955